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MARGINALITY, IDENTITY AND POLITICISATION
OF THE BHANGI COMMUNITY, DELHI.

A Thesis

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by

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Volume 1

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ABSTRACT

This research is about the Bhangi community of Old City of Delhi. Bhangis are the hereditary sweepers/scavengers in India. They are the ex-untouchables in the traditional caste system. The caste society is a form of stratification system where social inequality is structured and given legitimacy by the values of the advantaged sections of society. Bhangis have a very low place in the Hindu social order. They are below the pollution line and, therefore, outside the Hindu fold. However, they co-exist with caste Hindus and other religious communities as they do jobs which though dirty and polluting are essential for the smooth functioning of society. Bhangis are low paid and poor. Culturally, they have remained beyond the pale of Hindu Sanskritic Great Tradition, and have existed as part of the preliterate local Little Tradition. Their social, economic and cultural marginality is reflected in their peripheral settlement pattern.

This study is about the various aspects of socio-cultural and economic marginality of Bhangis, their stigmatised identity and their efforts to escape from their marginal situation by bringing about changes in their status. The awareness of exploitation and deprivation has led to unionisation and politicisation within the ambit of the democratic processes in India.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every day, in the cities and towns across the length and breadth of India, a few million men and women are seen holding on their heads baskets and large pans laden with night soil.

These they collect from offices, private dwellings and open spaces and carry to municipal filth depots. Yet more of their kind are engaged in removing and transporting the filth to the dumping grounds situated away from human habitation. These men and women are scavengers, the hereditary scavengers, the outcaste of Hinduism, and reflect, perhaps, the inner darkness of this great religion.

In Delhi (as in North-West India) these scavengers are called Bhangis. The inquiry into how the Bhangis came to be, their social disabilities, the Hindu beliefs and practices sanctioning the hereditary work and very low social status of the Bhangis, will need going far back to the beginnings of Hinduism.

1.1. SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Hindu caste society has been known as an extreme form of social stratification and social inequality. This structured inequality is given legitimacy by the values of the Hindu cultural system of which the most prevalent are the principles of purity and pollution. Social inequality is not a new phenomenon characteristic only of the Indian society. Social inequality is universal - a form of social injustice which

involves gain of some at the cost of others, manifesting itself as extremes of riches and of poverty and hunger. In some societies there is discrimination based on race and in others there is wide disparity in economic status of individuals. Although social inequality is universal phenomenon, the system of caste stratification in India has been unique in certain fundamental ways.

Sociologists have contributed to the vast literature on the caste system in India. As a system of inequality, the caste system may be defined as a large number of endogamous groups which are hierarchically arranged and in which membership is unique in the sense that some groups at the lowest level of hierarchy are considered as impure, not only the occupations they perform are considered impure but also their touch, even their shadow causes impurity to the higher castes. Untouchability is the extreme dimension of the caste system and it involves pollution by touch and distance. This is the hereditary untouchability of certain communities. They are born impure and they live the life of the impure, the stigma of untouchability is inherited by their children.

Concepts of Karma and rebirth have provided rationale for the notion of untouchability. One is born an untouchable because of the 'bad' Karma in one's past life. Good deeds lead to good Karma and bad actions to bad Karma.

Untouchables, the marginal groups of Indian society, have remained marginal over the centuries and their marginality is sustained by religious values and institutions. I shall now go into the details of how Hinduism has provided the philosophical justification for it.

1.2. HINDUISM

Hinduism is the oldest of the world's existing faiths. Broadly speaking it is the 'religion' of nearly 85 per cent of the population of India and of about 20 million inhabitants in the rest of the world. Hindu religion is a conglomerate of values, attitudes, practices and traditions and the Hindu child grows up and has absorbed these by the time he realises that he has a religion. There is a cavalcade of cultural/religious festivals throughout the year, of which some like Dushehra and Diwali are celebrated by every Hindu. Other festivals have appeal only for the adherents of a particular sect. These 'religious' observances and celebrations can be simple or elaborate, noisy, colourful, even brash or, quietly beautiful. Despite these festivals and large gatherings¹, worship (even in temples) is personal for which the priest is not essential. An invading horde of a different religion may destroy temples (as did most Muslim invaders, particularly Mahmud of Ghazni) but they cannot reach the inner relationship between a Hindu and his creator (or whatever facet or expression of the creator the Hindu may have chosen to worship). As Radhakrishnan put it, "though people of different races and cultures have been pouring into India from the dawn of history,

Hinduism has been able to maintain its supremacy, and even the proselytising creeds backed by political power² have not been able to coerce the large majority of Indians to their view. The Hindu culture possesses some vitality which seems to be denied to some other more forceful currents" (Radhakrishnan 1927; 11 - 12).

The Vedas are the fountainhead of Hindu faith. But the Vedas do not mention the word Hindu. However it is an old word and the people of Central and Western Asia used it for the people who lived east of and around the river Indus. In ancient times, this river was called Sindhu. (The part of the sub-continent of India through which river Indus - river Sindhu in vernacular - flows in its later half course is also called Sindhu or Sind province). The Chinese pilgrim, Hieun Tsang, who lived and travelled in India for about 15 years (630-645 A.D.) during the reign of Harsha (606-647 A.D.) wrote that the people of Central Asia called India Hindu (Hsintu). He wrote- "This is not at all a common name.... and the most suitable title for it is "Aryadesha", which means the "noble land" (Nehru 1961; 74). The word Hindu came to be used regarding the religion of the people of India, following the Muslim incursions into India. In ancient India, the Hindu religion was known as Arya Dharma.

To describe Hinduism is beset with difficulties. It is not a religion in the strict sense of the term, as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are, namely, a holy book and a prophet. The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagwat Gita which is a part of

the epic Mahabhartar, are held in reverence by the Hindus, but these are not the holy books in the sense that the Torah, the Bible and the Koran are to the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims, respectively. Christians and the followers of Islam have their schisms and sects, but there is nothing like the incredible variety, vagueness, complexity and fluidity of Hinduism. Nevertheless, all Hindus hold Vedas in special esteem, as the fountain-head¹ of Hinduism. This again creates problems, as many beliefs and practices of the Hindus are at variance with Vedic teachings. On the one hand there are the Hindus monists who believe in one impersonal God, the one Reality, and on the other, are animists who believe in a local deity. In between are believers in one personal God or a diversity of gods. There are also the followers of various 'gurus' or preceptors who claim a special dispensation from God and an easy access or even a short cut to salvation. Hinduism thus consists of a large number of sects with overlapping beliefs and practices. The central cluster of these beliefs and practices is the core of Hinduism, which is the repository of ancient Indian wisdom, studied and practised by the priests, the Brahmins (The study and practice is not barred to the non-priests). However, despite its orthodoxy, "Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, many sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or to say precisely whether it is a religion³ or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, as well as in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradictory of each other. Its essential spirit seems to be live and let live." (Nehru 1961; 75)

Despite its vagueness and multiplicity of beliefs and rituals, Hinduism has certain basic ideas: Brahmin (creator), Atman (soul), Prakriti (matter); Four Varnas or Four fold division of society, or the caste system; four Ashrams or the four stages of the life of the individual; Moksha or soul's deliverance from Karma or cycle of births and rebirths. This last is the peculiar and central theme of Hinduism.

To the world beyond India, Hinduism has always had a strange fascination. It was during Europe's colonial expansion in Asia that this fascination changed into fascination-revulsion syndrome. Christian missionaries, always on the lookout for the bizarre in acts of worship, found ample material for ridicule and contempt in the various cults and the practices of esoteric Hinduism. The most notable of these early missionaries was the Frenchman, the Abbe Dubois ("Hindu Manners, customs and ceremonies" - early 19th Century). This does not mean that some Hindu cults were not bizarre and even abhorrent. However, these cults and their practices have no sanction in the Vedas, the fountainhead of Hinduism.

This study is not concerned with Hindu cosmogeny or the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. It is however, closely related to the practical side of Hinduism, that is, Hindu view of the individual and his relation to society. The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus provided they accept the Hindu view of life under which the stress is not on religious conformity but on ethical and spiritual life. "The performance of the

good - and not the believer in this or that view - can never get into an evil state" (Bhagvad Gita, VII 40).

1.3. HINDU SOCIAL ORDER

The Hindu view of the individual and his place in society can be understood by looking into (a) the fourfold object of life; (b) the fourfold successive stages of life and: (c) the fourfold order of society.

(a) The fourfold object of life is desire and enjoyment, also artistic and cultural pursuits (Kama - which is not mere sexual lust), economic and political interests (Artha), ethical living (Dharma) and, spiritual freedom (Moksha). A brief description will not be out of place. Kama is man's feelings and desires. Contrary to the prevalent misconception that Hinduism is otherworldly and thus, disregarding of human efforts it (Hinduism) "lays down that we must pass through the normal life consciously and with knowledge, work out its values and accept its enjoyments" (Radhakrishnan 1940; 352).

Artha is material well being. Hinduism recognises as it does, that Prakriti or Matter is eternal along with God and Soul, also is aware of the need for material well-being. Without economic security, material and spiritual life of the individual remains restricted. "There was never in India a national ideal of poverty or squalor".(Radhakrishnan 1940; 353)

Kama or instinctive desires and Artha or economic and political pursuits are essential for individual well-being but Kama and

Artha, if unrestricted, lose their values. They must be subject to Dharma or the rule of right practice.

Beyond Kama, Artha and even Dharma is Moksha or emancipation. Moksha is conditioned by Karma the immutable principle of "invisible but universal balance scale of justice." (Radhakrishnan 1927; 53) - in which every act, every thought of the individual is weighed and the ineffaceable record carried by the soul even after death.

1.4. THE FOURFOLD STAGES

The fourfold stages of an individual's life or the Ashramas:- Hinduism considers Moksha or spiritual freedom as the chief purpose of man. For the individual to develop to this stage entirely on his own initiative, may not be easy; hence a detailed scheme for guidance. The scheme comprises Ashramas and classes (later castes). Human life is understood to be consisting of four consecutive stages or Ashramas. These are Brahmacharya or the period of training. Grahisthya or the period of work for the world as a house-holder. Vanaprasthya or the period of retreat (in a forest) for the loosening of social relationships; Sanayas or the period of renunciation for ultimate release of Atman (soul) from physical bondage.

The fourfold order of society (Varna) is: Brahmin or the man of learning and intellect; Kshatriya or the man of power; Vaishya or person of skilled economic productivity; the Shudra or man of unskilled service. It is this classification of society which, in course of time, degenerated into the present

caste system.

1.5. THE FOURFOLD OBJECTS

As said above, under the Hindu scheme of things, there are fourfold objects of life: desire and enjoyment (Kama); economic pursuit (Artha); righteousness (Dharma) and spiritual freedom or emancipation of the soul (Moksha). To realise these objects of life the individual had to undergo a fourfold scheme of training which had two aspects: that relating to the four successive stages of life, discussed above and, the fourfold order of society (Varna).

1.6. THE FOURFOLD ORDER

The ordering of society was based on the four human specific natures (Svabhava) to which each individual seemed to belong, fitting him for his own specific function (Svadharmā). The four specific natures were represented by the man of thought and learning (Brahmin), man of action and power (Kshatrya), man of feeling, artistry and skilled productivity (Vaishya), and the man in whom none of the above natures is predominant or the man of service (Shudra).

Nowhere in the Vedas is caste mentioned. The Varna classification above according to which society is divisible in the four classes, was first mentioned in Rig Veda X, 90 where they are described as having sprung from the body of the creative spirit from his head, arms, thighs and feet. "This poetical image is intended to convey the organic character of society.... There is a profound integration of the social

destiny with that of the individual" (Radhakrishnan 1940; 355)

The four classes are mentioned also in Yajur Veda XXX, 11 - "Brahmins were born of His - God's mouth, Kshatriyas, out of his arms, Vaishyas out of his thighs, and Shudras out of His feet." According to Satyarth Prakash, His in the mantra refers to the formless, All pervading being.... that the true meaning of this mantra is that in this universe, he who is the (Mukh) head, leader among men is a Brahmin, he in whom power and strength (Bahu) reside pre-eminently, is a Kshatriya. He who travels about from place to place for the purpose of trade, etc, and obtains all things for the community on the strength of his thighs is called a Vaishya, and lastly a Shudra is like feet, the lower most part of the body, because he is ignorant (S. Prakash Pp 98 - 99).

Much controversy has existed as to which of the four classes is the most superior or the most inferior. On the analogy that the head can exist without the other limbs, it is the head that is superior and therefore the Brahmins. But a body without the feet will severely be restricted in its movement. All limbs are necessary for the healthy functioning of the body and, therefore, all classes are mutually inter dependent. As we shall see, the Hindu idea supports this with certain qualifications.

The qualifications, characteristics, duties of the four Varnas (classes), as evident from the classical books are:-

"Studying and teaching, performing Yajna⁴ and assisting others in doing it, giving alms and receiving gifts - These six are duties of a Brahmin." But it should be borne in mind that "The receiving of gifts is a mean thing." (Manu 1, 88: from Satyarth Prakash P. 101).

Bhagvat Gita enumerates fifteen qualities of a Brahmin which sum up as purity of mind and body, complete indifference to the applause or censure in the discharge of one's Dharmic duties, perfect knowledge of all entities - from earthly things to God - and the proper application thereof, always cheerfully serving the parents, tutor and the altruistic teachers of humanity.

The Brahmins thus give moral guidance. They perceive and reveal but do not impose or enforce. Being pre-eminently intellectual they are the seekers and the communicators of knowledge, be it art, science, philosophy etc. Brahmins are not what Bouquet says that "they make the doctrinal formulations and frame the canons without being bound by them (Bouquet 1966; 39).

According to Vajrasukika Upanishad the true Brahmin is one who has sensed the deepest self and acts out of that consciousness. The perversions of the Brahminical ideal are a mere intellectuality without ethical considerations. Every society needs a class of ethical contemplative thinkers who are freed of material cares by the society, so that they could consider life's problems in a spirit of detachment, who proclaim the

truth that only the spirit of man is immortal and who are not the camp followers of politicians, or the rulers of the day.

While Brahmins are concerned with principles, values and social ideals and the ethical standards for the society, the Kshatriya class has to devise the means for attaining the ends.

Kshatriyas are the rulers and the administrators who are, (1) "to protect people by the administration of perfect justice without fear or favour i.e. by showing due respect to the good and punishing the wicked."

(2) To spend money in furthering the cause of truth and justice and in advancing knowledge and serving the deserving.

(3) To perform Homa and other Yajnas.

(4) To study the Veda and other Shastras.

(5) To shun the allurements of sensual gratification by perfect control of the senses and thereby constantly augmenting the powers of the body and the soul." (Manu 1, 89).

According to Bhagvad Gita, a Kshatriya was to be bold, dignified, firm of resolution and cool under difficulties, to be liberal minded and just in the discharge of public duties and to fight in such a way as to ensure victory.

The Kshatriya class, like the Brahmins, is necessary for the proper functioning of the society. The pervasions of the

Kshatriya ideal are power seekers, tyrants and advocates of brute force. In a perfect society, the need or occasions for force would not arise. But evil doers need restraining by society. The use of force was subject to restraints. For example:-

- (a) Force may sometimes be necessary for the establishment of justice, but justice itself is subject to love. Hence,
- (b) force must be used in an ethical, moral way. mere good ends are not enough.

The Hindus had elaborate rules of warfare which forbade the use of concealed weapons, poisoned arrows, or killing the enemy who had surrendered, wanton destruction of buildings or extirpation of the family of the defeated enemy. King Rama did not destroy the family of Ravana but restored the kingdom to Ravana's descendants.

War was not easily resorted to for gaining desired ends. "The victory that is achieved without war is much superior to the victory that is achieved through war." (Mahabharata XII, 94.1)

While Kshatriyas exercised the executive power they were only the guardians and servants of the law. Their actions were judged by Brahmins and the seers. The hermitage, that is the Sanyasis, the representatives of the whole ancient Hindu society, wise and impartial could take a correct view of administrative faults and advised the king thereon without reserve or fear. Speaking in the name of morality they were

heard with respect. They had the privilege to give their opinion even unasked for. For example, Narda Muni (a very astute gaunt looking, brisk Sanyasi) advised Krishna on the difficulties he was facing in his kingdom.

(In modern times, this ancient practice was revived by Mahatma Gandhi, when he criticised the Congress party ministers who had become power and privilege hungry. Jai Prakash Narayan censured Mrs. Gandhi's pre and post emergency rule.) The Kshatriya rulers usually confined themselves to the maintenance of law and order, and defence against invaders. The populace conducted their private and civil affairs according to customary rules. For instance, scales of taxation were fixed by sacred common law, namely, 1/6 crop, 1/10 merchandise. Thus the main source of oppression was ruled out. The taxation itself was regarded as king's wages for the services of good administration.

The third Varna was that of the Vaishyas the social group that represents the "tendency of life to possess and enjoy, to give and take. "(Radhakrishnan 1940; 363)

"To keep herds of cattle, breed, improve and multiply them.
 (2) To spend money, etc. in the advancement of knowledge and truth. (3) To perform Yajnas, such as, Homa (4) To study the Veda and other Shastras (5) To lend money on interest⁵
 (6) To cultivate land. These are the duties and qualifications of a Vashya." (Manu 1, 90)

The Vaishyas class comprises those who are engaged in agriculture, industry, and commerce; practical intelligence and skill are the main characteristics of this class. Perversions of this class are armament dealers, drug pushers, profiteers.

While mankind is dependent on the Vaishya class (and the Shudra class) for its physical existence, this class is not directly concerned with the mental and spiritual progress of society (which is the concern of the Brahmin) or the political power (which is the province of Kshatriya class). However, the Vaishyas, being leaders of commerce and industry, innovators in the exploitation of natural resources for the society set the tone for man's material well being. To what extent that material well being is enjoyed by the various groups in society - all of them or only a select few - has shown variations. The Hindu ideal was that property was a trust held by its possessor for the benefit of society. The rich and the wealthy were expected to spend a fair proportion of their riches for educational establishments, medical relief, drinking water etc for the people among whom they lived.

According to Ramayana (ii, 21. 58), Vaishyas who are keen on wealth for its own sake, are to be detested. We fail if we are addicted to enjoyment. (Quoted from Radhakrishnan 1940; 363) In other words, possessing wealth at the cost of others was socially reprehensible.

The Bhagvata tells us that we have a claim only to so much as would satisfy our hunger. If anyone desires more, he is a

thief deserving punishment. (vii, 14. 8. Quoted from Radhakrishnan 1960; 364) This is very "modern".....
 "Property is theft".... said Bakunin, the anarchist⁶,

The fourth and the last Varna was that of the Shudras who reflected the human nature to do physical work and to serve others.

Labour or work is natural to man and is the basis of all human relations. The Shudra class is pre-eminently suited to unskilled work. "It behoves a Shudra to earn his living by faithfully serving Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, without showing any disrespect, jealousy and conceit. This one thing alone is a Shudra's duty and qualification" (Manu 1, 91).

This quotation may appears to be starkly unfair to the Shudras if one takes them to be members of a caste as they are today. But, to the ancient Hindus, a Shudra was one who (in the words of Swami Dayananda) being ignorant through lack of education, is fitted for nothing higher, but can minister to the physical requirements of the community (Satyarth Prakash. P. 103).

There is no mention here of heredity as the basis of class, or of caste pollution. On the contrary, says Manu, "As the son of a Shudra may attain the rank of a Brahmin if he were to possess his qualifications, character and accomplishments and as the son of a Brahmin may become a Shudra if he sinks to his level in his character, inclinations and manners even so must it be with him who springs from a Kshatriya; even so with him who is born of a Vaishya (Manu: X, 65).

Reference may be made to Apastambha Sutras - "A low class man may, by leading a virtuous life rise to the level of a higher class man and he should be ranked as such. In like manner a high class man can by leading a sinful life sink down to the level of a class, lower than his and should be considered as such." (Quoted from Satyarth Prakash, P.100) Thus, the qualifications character and knowledge of a person determined the class of that individual. There are historical proofs of this class mobility: Sage Javal of an unknown class became a Brahmin (Chandohya Upanishad); Vishwamitra, Kshatriya by birth, became a Brahmin (Mahabhartar); sage Matang, an outcaste by birth, became a Brahmin. Vashishta was born of a prostitute, Vyasa of a fisherwoman and Parasara of a Chandala woman.

As mentioned earlier, the class of a person was dependent on his predominant natural type: the man of learning (Brahmin), the man of power and action (Kshatriya), the skilled craftsmen (Vaishya) and the labourer (Shudra). However, the four predominant qualities of the four classes are not exclusive to that class. All individuals and classes have qualities, in varying degrees, of the other classes. And rightly so, for the proper performance of the class functions. Thus, the Brahmin, in order to proclaim and serve truth needs the moral courage of Kshatriya, the Vaishya's art and skill to adapt knowledge to the varying situations and the needs of the different classes of society and, the Shudra's sense of service to people. The Kshatriya should have the knowledge about the philosophy governing his society, the adaptive skill to realize those aims and the sense of service to use power for public good. The Vaishya, in order to provide for the material needs of the society, should know what

is good for the society, should have the courage to take risks in economic matters and subordinate profit motive to public spirit. The labourer too should know that without his contribution, knowledge and the skill to build a dam, for instance, would be of little avail.

1.7. THE CASTE SYSTEM

The Hindu system of classes gradually and over a long period degenerated into what is now known as Castes. When mere accident of birth became more important than a person's qualification, character and accomplishments classes degenerated into castes. The chief features of caste are: Heredity, hierarchy, restrictions on occupation, on commensal relations and on acceptance of food and drink from members of other castes. These features of caste will be looked into briefly, followed by an inquiry into its beginnings, its characteristics as these were before the institution came to be affected by contacts with the West, the ways the caste has impinged upon the Shudras and, especially, the Bhangis.

The word caste is of Portuguese and Spanish origin and means something not mixed. "The word seems to have been used in the sense of race by the Spaniards, and to have been applied to India by the Portuguese in the middle of the fifteenth century (Dumont, 1970: S. 11). The word caste has no equivalent in Indian languages. It is sometimes used as meaning Varna (the four classes of sacred texts) and at other times as synonymous with the Indian word Jati. The Indians use Jati to designate Varna or the four classes and also their sub-divisions. "The

word Jati etymologically means 'something into which one is born'. It is occasionally used by good ancient authorities as equivalent to 'Varna'" (Ghurye P. 176). There is the notion of 'gotra', which refers to the Septs and the family, and is as old as caste.

The beginnings of caste are lost in antiquity. There is no mention of castes in the Vedas, that is, there were no castes when the Vedas were composed⁷.

There are no references to connubial or commensal relations. Occupations were not hereditary. There is mention of the fair - skinned Aryans and the dark skinned Dasyus (Dasas or Asuras), but no mention of caste as such. There is a school of thought which holds that caste is of pre- Aryan or of Dravidian origin. Oldenberg sponsored the view in 1907, "that tabus on commensality were pre-Aryan in origin" (Hutton 1931; 434.) Ghurye rejects this idea.

According to Ghurye, the earliest available Tamil literature, as throwing light on Tamil culture, is that of Sangam age (2nd century BC), wherein there is no evidence of Tamil contribution to caste. For this Ghurye has the authority of N. Subramaniam the author of "Sangam Polity," 1968, whom Ghurye quotes thus - "the Brahmins as a caste was an Aryan gift to Tamiliham (Tamilnadu): not the person but the concept".... that the Velirs and Vellalars the real Tamils "were non-Aryans North Indian immigrants".... that the Tamil caste system even of the Sangam age "depended entirely on the Brahmins," who were

"such ideal priests, scholars and philosophers⁰ that not only were they themselves greatly venerated by all alike but it was possible for the caste system also to build itself up in their name and none found any reason for rejecting any of the implications of the caste system" (Ghurye 1969; 238).

Let us turn to the main features of the caste system or the caste referents as they are sometimes called:-

1) Birth Ascribed Social Position of the Individual:-

Traditionally an individual is born in his caste. Membership of a caste is hereditary, unlike that of an association which is voluntary. The son of a Brahmin (or Shudra) is known by his caste category irrespective of his personal qualities or the lack of these. A person may lose his caste status only in extreme situation of a flagrant violation of caste code. Castes thus are segments or blocks of society each with its own manners and customs and hereditary profession.

Persons of different castes (a Brahmin or a Vaishya) may be in the same vocation (office, manufacture etc) and thus equally subject to the requirements of the vocation but a Brahmin engineer and a Kshatriya engineer, though holding equal qualifications and posts, belong to two different status categories in the caste hierarchy and, in their private lives social intercourse between the two may not be on equal terms.

Professionally they may belong to the same union, and subject to the standing rules of the union, but in their private life

they are bound by caste custom regarding birth, marriage and death.

"These and similar affairs of day to day life require the co-operation of one's caste people. Hence castes are small and complete social worlds in themselves, marked off definitely from one another, though subsisting within the larger society." (Ghurye: P. 6)

A word about the caste council: Just as a person is bound by the rules and regulations of the trade union or professional association of which he is a member, the caste rules as applied by the caste council are binding on the caste members. To the extent that the caste councils, where they exist, protect the economic interests of the caste, they are like trade guilds or associations.

2) Hierarchy:- Castes rest on social precedence. The twice-born three upper castes are demarcated from the Shudras and the untouchables. Among the twiceborn, the hierarchical order rises from Vaishya to Brahmin at the apex. However, the position is not as simple as that. While there is no dispute regarding the position of the Brahmin and the Shudra and the untouchable on the hierarchy scale, the intermediate castes have no idea or agreement as to their relative position. This was noted by the British census takers. For instance the artisan caste Kammalan of South India disputed the supremacy even of Brahmins (Madras census 1871. P. 151). This dilemma of the intermediate castes is due to their number and ranking

complexity. Ghurye has estimated that there are upto 200 castes in each of the major linguistic regions of India, that these castes can be grouped in classes (Varnas) and the grouping will be largely acknowledged by all "But the order of social precedence⁸ amongst the individual castes of any class cannot be made definite because not only is there no ungrudging acceptance of such rank but also the ideas of the people on this point are very nebulous and uncertain." (Ghurye, P. 6)

3) Commensal Restrictions:- The elaborate practices and restrictions regarding food and social intercourse bifurcate India into the Indus - Gangetic plain and the country South of the Vindhya. The food, too, is of two categories. Kachcha and Pakka. This categorisation of food is prevalent among Hindus of the Indus - Gangetic plain. In the rest of India, no caste will accept food from a caste lower than itself. Kachcha or inclusive food is that of every day consumption; in its cooking water is added. Pakka or exclusive food is cooked or fried in Ghee (clarified butter) or in cooking oil.

Compared to Hindus of South India, Hindus of North India have been, and are more tolerant in regard to caste restrictions on food. It may be that the Hindus South of the Vindhya merely show the fervour of neoconverts to casteism. Also, the Indo Gangetic plain has always been open to invasions from across the Khyber, not only armed invasion but also open to

the influence of socially egalitarian ways of the invaders. As to the two categories of food – Kachcha and Pakka, the former is more easily polluted than the latter by the touch of a caste lower than one's own.

Understandably a lower caste will accept cooked food from any higher caste. This idea of purity and pollution obviously applies to persons. Brahmin pollutes no one; the Bhangi defiles all. This results in the privileges of the upper castes and disabilities of the lower castes. This I shall elaborate in a subsequent section.

4) Occupational Restrictions:- In the Vedic period an individual followed the occupation of the class to which he belonged by reason of his ability and aptitude. Not so under the system of castes. Heredity has determined a person's caste and, therefore, his caste occupation.

Caste restraints among the twiceborn have operated to prevent a high caste person from taking to any work which was degrading or polluting. Together with this social restraint, was the positive restriction put by castes, particularly the Brahmins, concerning the priestly profession which has been the caste monopoly of the Brahmins. This caste restriction on occupation has been only generally true, because certain occupations have been open to most castes e.g. agriculture, trading and military service. And Brahmins have, besides the caste occupation of the priest, ventured into not only the

'related' occupation of teaching and accountancy but also in trade, agriculture, army and even labouring. (Madras census, 1871, P. 133)

Before the Mutiny, Brahmins used to join the army in large numbers. (Wilson 1877 Vol 11; 115) As will be mentioned in my chapter on Delhi city, Mangal Pandey who signalled the Mutiny, was a Brahmin. Restrictions on occupation hurt the Shudra castes and even more the untouchables, the Bhangis who, until very recent times were destined to sweeping and latrine cleaning or similar dirty jobs.

6. Marital Restrictions:- In traditional orthodox Hinduism inter-caste marriages are forbidden. Westermarck has called this caste endogamy the essence of the caste system. (Westermarck 1921 Vol 11. 59) This was noted as early as the 3rd century BC by Megasthenes. Marital restrictions extend to the numerous Gotras or subcastes of the main castes. E.A.W. Blunt, in his book, "The Caste System of Northern India 1931, added the middle term of subcaste and gave the five categories of marital restriction as: endogamy, exogamy, prohibited degrees of kin, hypergamy and virgin marriage. His observation on the marital restrictions are, "Same for certain quite exceptional castes, the first of these restrictions is universal. Either the second or the third operates in every caste; generally both operate together. The fourth is common. The fifth (which forbids a man to marry a widow) applies to perhaps one-third of the population, i.e. to most higher castes."

J.H. Hutton who also deals with endogamy, hypergamy and exogamy, observes - "caste endogamy is more or less incidental to the taboo on taking food cooked by a person of at any rate a lower caste." (Hutton 1961; 71) Ghurye observes thus on Hutton's observation - "It appears that Hutton considers the connection of endogamy with caste as secondary, endogamy itself being incidental to the commensal taboo!" (Ghurye 1969; 220) In Ghurye's considered view endogamy is the "core and soul" of caste.

Hypergamy or 'anuloma' hypergamy is taking one's wife from a Varna immediately lower than one's own. "As a matter of fact since very early times, i.e. at least from about 500 BC, it has been the practice of all texts on sacred law to account for a large number of named groups as a result of these intermarriages their permutations and combinations." (Ghurye 1969; 222)

The other kind of inter-caste marriage - that between a female of the higher Varna and the male of the lower known as 'pratiloma' hypergamy - was condemned in the post Vedic Shastras. At the present time, occasional inter-caste marriages among the educated, primarily urbanite upper caste Hindus, inter-caste marriages even of pratiloma hypergamy, are socially acceptable, provided the "personal merits" of the couple "match" and the families have a "good background." The quoted words are among the most commonly used in matrimonial columns of Sunday newspapers in India. Parity of "personal merits" is entirely Vedic; good family background usually means families of equal "social", that is, economic status and of similar

outlook. The ultimate in outlook is to accept "social drinking" as modernistic.

No account of caste system will be complete without a brief reference to 'gotra' exogamy which is Sept - exogamy and prohibited degrees of marital relationship. Gotras are subdivisions of sub-castes. Like all higher caste Hindus, Bhangis of Delhi observe 'gotra' exogamy; they avoid the following 'gotras': one's own or father's: father's mother's father's: mother's father's. All high caste Hindus avoid the above 'gotra' and some also of mother's mother's father's.

Besides 'gotra' exogamy, Bhangis of Delhi (Shehri or city Bhangis) will not marry away their daughters into Bhangi households who have emigrated to Delhi from surrounding villages in recent times, that is during and after the second world war period when New Delhi and Delhi expanded. Compared to non-Shehri Bhangis, Shehri Bhangis owning, as they are, Mohallas/Thikanas (private scavenging in upper caste households) are considered (by these non-Shehri Bhangis) as of higher status, while they themselves are considered by the Shehri Bhangis as mere country folk, bumpkins, and unfamiliar with the cultured ways of the city. For a Shehri Bhangi to marry away his daughter into non-Shehri Bhangi household will be tantamount to loss of status. This is 'pratiloma' exogamy. The reverse is acceptable that is, a non-Shehri Bhangi female marrying into Shehri Bhangi family. These 'hypergamous' practices among the Bhangis, even though on a very small scale point to social interaction among the Shehri and non-Shehri Bhangis.

As said above, the Vedic system of classes seems to have degenerated into castes when mere accident of birth became more important than a person's character and acquirements. Why and how this degeneration occurred has given rise to various theories. An examination of these theories and the disabilities under which the low castes have lived over the ages will be of direct bearing on the present status of Bhangis, the lowest of the low castes.

There is the ethnic theory of caste; that the Indo-Aryans who were of fair colour and had straight high nose, noted rather disparagingly, the dark colour and flat nose of the then aborigines of North India whom they called Dasas, Dasyus, Asuras, that this racial attitude first gave birth to Varnas or the four-fold division into the four-fold caste system. Indo-Aryans showed the colour and race attitude common to their other Indo-Aryan peoples in ancient world, e.g. Greece, Rome, Germany etc. "Well marked status groups, distinguished from another by rights and disabilities separated from one another by the absence of freedom of inter-marriage, may, therefore, be considered to be a common characteristic of the mental background and social picture of the Indo-European cultures. Specialisation of occupations, accompanied by solidarity within specified occupations and great freedom about their choice, was a feature common to the ancient and mediaeval times." (Ghurye 1969; 159)

The Indo-Aryans carried this theory of status of birth to its ultimate limit. Risley was the chief exponent of the ethnic

theory of caste. He applied anthropometry to the solution of the problem of caste. Comparing the nasal indices of some castes of Northern India, Risley came to the conclusion that nasal index gradation substantially corresponded with that of social hierarchy. (Risley. P. 40)

Keane, in his "Man, Past and Present" (1920) held that in the United provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), the nose index exactly corresponded to social status (P. 546). Ghurye rejects the findings. Comparing his own table of nasal index for the various castes of the UP with the order of social precedence as given in the census Report of 1901, Ghurye says, "These comparisons prove that the statement of Keane is baseless and that of Risley is true only in a broad sense." (Ghurye 1969; 123) However, on pages 124-125, Ghurye seems to contradict his rejection of Risley and Keane when he says, "Outside Hindustan in each of the linguistic area we find that the physical type of the population is mixed, and does not conform in its gradation to the scale of social precedence of the various castes.... Some of the castes, very low in their social status, actually stand higher in physical features than some of the higher castes. In Hindustan, on the other hand, the gradation of physical types from the Brahmin downwards to Musahar corresponds very closely to the scheme of social precedence prevailing among the Hindustani castes." (underlining mine) This state of things Ghurye attributes to the origin of endogamy with the Brahmin class (Musahar, meaning mouse-eater, is the name of a low aboriginal caste of Uttar Pradesh.

I may mention here that an exclusive restaurant in Amsterdam serves high-priced roast rats to their clientele).

However, the correspondence of physical and social gradation in Uttar Pradesh, noted by Ghurye (underlined above) has an important exception - the Chuhra or Bhangi of Panjab! This Ghurye found from his anthropometric inquiry. Comparing the differential indices of the various castes in U.P. and Panjab, he came to the startling conclusion that "the Brahmin of the U.P. has closer physical affinities with the Chuhra and the Khatri of the Panjab than with any caste from his own province except the very high caste of Chhatri" (which is the same as Khatri of Panjab, the next higher to the Brahmin, in caste hierarchy). Ghurye P. 119 . He re-affirms this on P. 174, and then observes, "U.P. Brahmin's separateness from most of the lower castes of his region shows that he has succeeded in keeping his physical type as undiluted as possible under the circumstances." As Delhi lies between the old provinces of Panjab and the United Province, and as Delhi Bhangis emigrated from the villeges around Delhi, the above observations of Ghurye raise need for determining the ethnic make up of Delhi Shehri Bhangis.

Returning to the ethnic theory of caste origin, there is considerable controversy among anthropologists on the subject: Both Ibbetson and Nesfield, the pioneers of the sociological study of caste, "endorse the view that caste is mainly occupational in origin i.e. occupations which were organised into guilds slowly become exclusive and stratified into castes.

Nesfield went further and, affirming the essential unity of the Indian race, emphatically denied that racial distinction was the basis of caste" (Ghurye 1969; 114). However, Nesfield's "unity of the Indian race" does not explain the six main physical types among the Hindus of India: the Indo-Aryan; Pre-Dravida; Dravida; the western; Munda and the Mongoloid. Again, while castes show considerable occupational roots, the Hindu myth of superiority of fair complexion and high nose and the efforts to maintain purity of blood through endogamy of caste and gotra, point to ethnic origins of the caste phenomenon.

However, the occupational theory of caste origins has its merits. The original four classes or Varnas were based on a person's natural abilities and attainments. Not wishing to enter into the old controversy about nature versus nurture, I would say that an individual's natural abilities need a suitable environment to reach full potential; also, the family and the group to which the individual belongs, do have a profound moulding influence. The ancient Hindus lived by an agricultural, small scale and craft production economy, in which children from a very early age help their parents in the economic process. With a few exceptions, the new generation follows the old. The family occupations, over the ages, solidify into caste occupations. The upper three castes, holding prestige, power and ownership of land, had a vested interest in the continuation of the system. A re-interpretation of Karma made birth as the determinant of an individual's

station in life. (This will be discussed at the appropriate place). As occupations proliferated, so did the castes.

In fact, sub-castes may be due to several reasons:

1.8. THE SUBCASTES

1) Mixed Origins:- Chandala, the offspring of a Brahmin female and Shudra male. Bhilalas are the offspring of Rajput males and Bhil women. Korchamars of central India "are said to be the descendants of alliance between Chamars and Koris or weavers (Nesfield P. 106).

2) Occupational Distinction:- The most obvious from the original Varna to the sub-divisions like Teli (oil presser) Mochi (cobbler), Tarkhan (carpenter) etc. From Arthashastra and Jatak literature it is evident that these specific occupations were hereditary.

3) Peculiarities in the technique of one and the same occupation have produced sub-caste names: Among Kumbhars or potters of Maratha region, are Hatghades or hand potters, Thorchake or those who use a big wheel and Lahanchake or small wheel users. The Jatakas refer to fishermen who used nets and baskets as Kevattas and the angling fishermen as Balistikas (R. Fick: Social organisation in North-East India in Buddhist Time, 1920).

4) Territorial Origins:- Low caste 'immigrants' from UP settled in the towns and cities of Panjab, and working as washermen, barbers etc, are given the territorial name Purbia meaning a person from the Eastern region. In Panjab, Doabia

or people settled between the rivers Sutlej and Beas, reference may also be made to sub-castes bearing the name of some ancient city, e.g. Brahmin sub-castes Kanaujia from Kanauj, Saraswat named after the river Saraswati.

5) Sectarian Differences:- Among Maharashtrian Brahmins the Rigvedi and Yajurvedi sub-castes (Kabirpanthis Radhaswamis are sects, not sub-castes, as their followers are found in all the castes and outcastes.)

The brief description of caste origins and the caste groupings leads to the functioning of this complex caste society and the disadvantages suffered by the low castes particularly the untouchables.

Once caste replaced classes, the Hindu society showed a bias towards the upper three classes - and prejudice towards the Shudras and increasing contempt for the untouchables. Castes emerged sometimes in post Vedic period 600 BC - 300 AD.

There is mention of castes in the epics and the Buddhist literature. It is the Dharma Shastras period (ending 10th or 11th century AD) that excelled in giving the final shape to the Hindu caste system, in all its rigidity continued down to the beginning of the 19th century, particularly in peninsular India. The British rulers of India did not directly intervene to ameliorate the lot of the Shudras until 1919 and that, too, for their ulterior imperialistic purpose.

The Mutiny of 1857 had driven home the lesson to the British

that a caste ridden Hindu society was a divided society and, as such, opposed to national unity and therefore, safe for the continuation of the British rule. However, certain steps of the British administration affected the traditional caste institutions; for example, the ^bestablishment of British courts, administering a uniform criminal code, took away from caste councils cases of assault, adultery etc. However, the British left the caste alone. The caste problem was a problem for the Hindus themselves and, the educated among them, coming in contact with the liberalising culture of the rulers, started movements for reformation of the Hindu society. In the post - independence period, caste rigidity has softened somewhat in certain ways and a serious attempt has been made to abolish the civil disabilities of the lower castes. However, in the name of the Hindu glory, obscurantist forces keep trying to revive the upper caste harshness of the Dharam Shastras towards the lower castes. (This I shall discuss in the chapter on Politics of Bhangis). The Chief exponents of Dharam Shastras were Manu⁹, Bandhayana, Vasistha, Gautama and Apastamba. Manu Smriti was revised - and interpolated. The revised version shows a Manu different from the one quoted in the earlier part of this chapter.

To keep the Shudras in their allotted place, Hindu law givers were draconian. As Brahmins were the interpreters of the sacred law, their position was exalted (compare this with the exalted position and the supposed impartiality of the Judges in a modern state). The Vedic poetic idea of creation of classes having sprung from the various limbs of God was now

interpreted to mean that the Brahmin was the lord of this whole creation, because he was created from the best part of God, the mouth. Manu entitles Brahmins to whatever exists in the world - (Manu I, 93-101). In purity they are akin to fire and water and, therefore, Brahmins are not contaminated by forbidden acts, if done in adversity (Manu X, 43, 103). According to Vishnu Smriti (P. 77), "The gods are invisible deities, the Brahmins are visible deities." The unity of the upper castes (particularly of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas) is underlined, and so is the degraded position of the lower castes.

The high caste attitude, and practices towards the lower castes have been for maintaining physical and social distance. The idea of purity and pollution, working as they are on the subconscious mind, are powerful aids in maintaining that lordly distance.

1.9. SOCIAL DISABILITIES

To ensure, that the lower castes continued in their degraded functions, a vast scheme of social disabilities was envisaged. These operated in the practical, administrative or day to day context. Behind these was carefully thought out system of brain washing, couched in religious terms and working through a re-interpretation of Karma and transmigration of soul and rebirth. I shall first discuss the social disabilities of the lower castes.

As early as the Vedic period, the Shudra, even on the basis

of the most liberal interpretation of his place in society, was (because of his lack of education, valour and skill or commercial, economic enterprise) fit for manual and menial jobs. There is nothing wrong in this as the Shudra class like the other classes, did not have a hereditary basis. But the ideal gave place to a caste society based on hereditary privileges for the upper castes and "working his superior's" feet for the Shudra. The social disabilities and disadvantages of the Shudra caste were very thorough. The Shudra was not considered fit for any of the religious ceremonies and this was a blow to his dignity as a human being in a society which was increasingly interested in the mere rituals and not the spirit of religion. The Shudra's mere presence in these ceremonies was considered as of little benefit to him. The exclusion of Shudras from Yajnas in the Vedic times was like the exclusion of doctors from the deliberations of historians and vice versa. But now the exclusion of Shudras from religious practices showed upper caste contempt for lower castes as lower castes. A Shudra came to be considered as of rather suspect moral calibre; according to Shatapatha Brahmana, Shudras was untruth itself. Irrespective of whether the Brahmin caste was in ascendancy or the Kshatriyas, the Shudras were looked down upon. To ensure the perpetuation of their degraded position, Shudras were denied access to education, that is rite of initiation to studentship, the study of Vedas and the kindling of the sacred fire. (Apastamba: Pp 1-2). Once a Shudra always a Shudra. This hopelessness extended to the low caste children. Even in the legendary Ram Rajya or rule of Rama, low castes suffered from various disabilities.

In the epic Ramayana, Rama killed a Shudra who was practising religious austerities which had caused the untimely death of a high caste child. (Rama also banished his wife Sita in response to public opinion, though he personally was convinced of her innocence. The banishment was a quick response to aspersion on Sita's character from a Dhobi - a low caste. Defenders of Ram Rajya hold that the low caste person who was practising austerities wanted his early salvation at the hand or sword of Rama).

To ensure the degradation and continuity of the lower castes as lower castes, they were segregated in their own localities, both in the villages and the towns.

Intercaste marriages were forbidden and very strongly so between the upper castes and the Shudra. But human nature being what it is, some unions took place between the upper castes and the Shudras. Vashishta, the law giver, held that a female of the dark race or Shudra caste was meant only for enjoyment and not for marriage or children. Exception could be in case of dire necessity e.g. when king Dashratha could not procreate children from his upper caste wives, he actually married Sumitra, a Shudra by caste. As I will show later and also in the section on Jajmani that caste relations reflected the economic fact of life. Some lower caste women compelled by penury or tempted by a few seers of grain may have fallen a prey to what Vashishta called the "enjoyment" of the upper caste males. Hindu law givers must have been aware of this pleasure pursuit happening in reverse, that is a Brahmin or

upper caste female having illicit relations with a Shudra and, despite all precautions to keep the "pleasure" secretive, offspring would have resulted. These offsprings were called 'chandals', if the female was a Brahmin. (Ghurye is of the opinion that perhaps "the Vedic Dasa aborigines, by constant association and slow assimilation, had been partially incorporated into the Nishada, while the refractory and incorrigible elements were specially despised and styled Paulkasa and Chandala." (Ghurye 1969; 53) In this light, the Chandala offspring terminology was a horrible example to the deviating Shudra male, the punishment was harsh: severing of the organ; and confiscation of property (Gautama P. 236), death, or burning alive, tied up in straw. (Apastamba P. 165). Even the relatively liberal Brihaspati, a law giver of the 6th century AD has ordained death for "the man who has connection with a woman of higher caste than his own" (Sacred Books of the East series XXIII Vol. 12) One may compare this with the lynch laws in the United States. The position of lower castes is hardly different under Jainism or Buddhist. The Jain Tirthakaras were all born in Kshatriya families and the Bodhisattvas were born in Brahmin or Kshatriya families only. Buddha himself belonged to Shakya Kashatriyas. A king belonging to this family who had a daughter from Shudra woman did not eat food brought by that daughter.

The Dharmasastras developed the idea that intercaste dining among the upper castes was contrary to caste purity. If such was the social distance between the upper castes it was no wonder that the Shudra and, especially, the Chandala or out-

caste imparted pollution to the upper caste by his touch and by his mere approach to the upper three castes. The householder is expected to throw leftover food to Chandala and the dogs and cows (Vasishtha, P. 50). The Chandalas or Apapratras were akin to Shudras. The food vessels used by Chandalas were permanently polluted. To this day no Hindu will knowingly take food or drink in a plate or tumbler which has been used by a Bhangi. No wonder, the Chandalas or other lower castes lived in their miserable hamlets outside the bounds of villages and towns. Of all the features of caste system, the most blatant has been that of purity and pollution. Theoretically, the mere touch of a person from a caste lower than one's own is defiling. However, observance of the rule has shown regional variations, being stricter in South India¹⁰ than in the North; and, inter-caste variations, that is, pollution causing quality being in inverse proportion to the caste rank, the untouchables like Chandala and Bhangis causing the absolute pollution are, therefore, the outcastes. They have suffered the greatest social and religious disabilities. Segregation of their houses outside the village or town boundaries, restriction on their entry into places of worship, ban on drawing water from the wells of the high caste have prevailed openly until the beginning of the present century. Bhangis still face these obnoxious disabilities in varying degrees, particularly in the villages. The more glaring example of social degradation like keeping away from upper castes by twenty four paces (in Tamilnadu), dragging a thorny branch to wipe out his footprints (Mahars in Maratha country); restriction on umbrellas and wearing of shoes

(Izhavas and Shanars in Malabar), were not evident in the relatively tolerant Panjab - Delhi area. But even here, a Bhangi while walking in the streets of the towns had to carry a broom and to shout "Bhangi Bhangi" to warn unwary people about his polluting nearness. (Panjab census 1911, P.413). At the present time, the Bhangi is under no obligation to warn others about his presence.

1.10. KARMA BELIEF

Hindu caste society has ideological and religious notions which previously brainwashed a whole people. Brainwashing - a term which originated during the Korean war when the Americal soldiers held as P.O.W's in North Korean and Chinese territory, were subjected to systematic ideological propaganda - has a history much older. Hindus of post Vedic age brainwashed themselves into believing that a person's place in society was not to be on the basis of his 'class' (his innate qualities and acquirements), but was to be determined by the accident of birth in a particular caste. This accident of birth was now elevated to the end product of Karma in previous life. Earlier in the chapter, I have described Karma as the immutable principle of "invisible but universal balance scale of justice," in which every act, every thought of the individual is weighed and the ineffaceable record is carried by the soul even after death. Understood thus, Karma is a moral law of great force. But in the hands of the caste ideologues Karma became a tool of ideological significance for justifying caste tyranny as manifestation of divine will. Not only caste tyranny but also every sort of social and economic oppression, too, came

to be explained in terms of Karma. That is to say, that future birth is determined by the sum total of actions in the present life. The regression from human to animal life, or from a higher to a lower caste was the play of Karma. If a low caste person performed his caste duties honestly and without questioning the truth of Karma, he would be assured of reincarnation in a higher caste. The hope was in the next life, not in the present. The universal balance scale of justice that Karma was according to Vedas, now became a doctrine of social slavery, both for the lower castes and the upper caste poor, who must have been numerous even in Upanishad era and to which economic bracket (of the poor) - Indian economists' descriptive category in modern times - about 90 percent of the people of India belong.

The apparently simple proposition had the strength of the main Upanishadic ideas behind it. Much of the Upanishad teaching (and of neo-Vadanta) veered away from Vedic philosophy.

First the belief that Brahman alone exists and is the source of all phenomena, including the Prakriti or matter and Atma or soul. Everything is God's creation, from universe to the caste system. Pain, suffering, social injustices, all are Brahman's 'lila' or divine play and have an overall divine purpose without which not a leaf can move or a grain of sand. The complaining individual, because of his imperfections and limited knowledge, cannot comprehend even a fraction of the divine purpose underlying happiness of some

and misery of most. Human suffering (or happiness) is explained either as an illusion or a manifestation of divine will. Nay, some self-inflict pain in order to turn their mind on God.

As the phenomenal world is now believed to be an illusion, real, empirical persons and their relationships do not exist, or do not have any significance. Hence, there is no need for critically looking at human problems or for transforming social relationships. There are, indeed, occasional references to work as a path to Brahman. For example: "The Parameshvara is attainable only by him by whom meritorious deeds have been done...." (Mundakupanishad, 3.1.4). The Bhagwad Gita urges work, acts or Karma as the means to knowledge of Brahman.... selfless action without attachment to fruit (5,11).... and that we may worship God through Bhakti, devotion and by performing our assigned duties (18. 46). However, this call to virtuous conduct is overwhelmed by the basic Upanishadic tenet that the essence of man is not the empirical corporeal being, but Atma which itself is Brahman. One example will give Upanishadic idea of this - It (body) always naturally exudes at the appropriate time impure secretions through the nine orifices. Having impure matter, it stinks.... viewing this body as 'I' and 'mine' is smearing oneself with faeces and urine in the place of cosmetics" (Maitreya panished 2.5-9) For him, who would not develop an aversion for this body of his, stinking with filth, what other inducement for detachment could be prescribed for his benefit? (Muktikapanishad, II. 61-64). Gone is the Vedic ideal of fourfold life, each

stage to be lived in full. In its place is asserted "arriving at indifference" (Mundakopanishad 1.2.12).

No stage of one's life is of any worth. "In childhood there is fear of the teacher, fear of the mother, fear of the father. The youth..... influenced by the demon of lust..... is ultimately vanquished by it. Servants, sons and friends laugh at man shaking with old age" (Mahopanishad, III, 50-55)

Karma is brought in: each person is born in the family and caste appropriate to his acts in the past life. As the caste society was static, Karma came as a convenient formula to explain every social ill. Suffering is an illusion, but even if it is real, it is only the inevitable result of Karma. The socially disadvantaged individuals, (and castes) have no hope of immediate redemption. They should work out of their present situation through the inexorable Karma, but faithfully performing the caste duties and thereby hoping for a birth in a better caste, in the next life. "In plain words it was tantamount to asking him (the low caste) to wait till doomsday. The mark of inferiority was permanently impressed on him, and his low status was declared by implication to render it impossible for him to work out his salvation in his own person" (Ghurye 1969; 66). This was the social significance of the Upanishadic and neo-Vedantist philosophy. In the words of Arun-Shourie, "Man is no longer a being in society and of society, a being in active and productive relationship with other beings like himself. He is an abstraction whose only significant relationship with another abstraction, Brahman,

and the significance of relationship is that the two abstractions turn out to be one." (Shourie 1979; 145). The general social tenor of the Upanishad is farther and farther away from social inquiry and towards acceptance of status quo. The ideal man of the latter day Hindus is not the man of action, but the man of no-action - "as here the world acquired by work perishes, so there the world acquired by merit perishes" (Chandogyopanishad 8.1.6). Mind is conceived as the cause of all trouble; hence elaborate methods to still it to its final dissolution. "All non-spiritual activity is characterised by the play of an active part in worldly affairs, true knowledge is the characteristic of renunciation" (Narada Parivrajakopanishad, 3. 16). The ultimate renunciation progresses from looking inward to the state of deep sleep - not the ordinary everyday deep sleep of ordinary mortals, but the volitional deep sleep that comes after total stilling of the senses at will. The ultimate in this rarified state of no-action is Turya state, which is a state of stagnation. (Anna-Purnopanishad, 3, 9-17)

I may conclude this with a quotation from Narada-parivrajakopanishad, 3. 61, 5.26 - "Actions entailing blessing, those connected with injury as well as those intended for the welfare of the world, these (the ascetics) shall neither perform nor cause others to perform." The ideal Hindu man should not concern himself with human problems.

Gita tried to bridge the gap between the "pure consciousness"

world view of Upanishads and the real world of people. But its stress on Nishkama Karma, that is, disinterested work, or acts done without reference to love or hatred, or work done without the idea of reward, though commendable in itself was one more ideological implement at the disposal of those wanting the continuance of caste society: carry on performing the caste functions and the benefit will follow, if not now and here then in a later life.

Karma can be two-edged: as a link between the past deeds of the individual and his present state, Karma may induce fatalism - the present having been pre-determined by the past deeds. At the same, the doctrine is a call to action and struggle as it interlinks the present with the future. But in the Hindu society, characterised by extreme social debility of the lower castes along with the economic exploitation of the vast majority of the upper castes, Karma, for most people has remained an unknown quantity.

Whenever there is misery and fear of even greater misery (to imitate Gita), arise pious insurance agents and Karma controllers who guarantee salvation on the cheap e.g. the saints and gurus, caste marks, elaborate hymns, incantations or holy chant, Rudraksha - mala or the rosary. The devotee or believer in these elaborate rituals, idols, etc endows them with strange meanings and powers and believes in the reality of those attributes. This leads to self-hypnosis; this is the later day Soma. No wonder, these gurus have

always had the support - open or covert - of the rulers. The populace, sunk in superstition, ranging from animism to the occult have displayed a strange variety of beliefs and practices which have been hailed as the richness of Hinduism, by the simple-minded as well as by those who have wanted the people to remain sunk in ignorance and blind faith. Despite their overwhelming social disadvantages the Shudras have struggled to cast away the caste ordained shackles: for example the Shudra who was engaged in religious austerities and hence was slain by king Rama. Reference may be made to Eklavya, the Shudra archer whom Draunacharya refused to accept as his pupil but when Eklavya continued practising in front of a statue of Draunacharya when he proved himself to be a self-taught archer excelling even Arjuna, Draunacharya's favourite Kshatriya prince, the Brahmin Draunacharya demanded from the Shudra archer his right thumb as Guru Dakshina or honourarium due from pupil to his guru. These are tales from the Epics. At the village level where most people lived, any rebellion on the part of low castes was easy to foresee and forestall; the strong sanctions in Dharamshastras against Shudras trying to imitate the ways of the superior castes point to potential unrest.

Conversions to Islam and later to missionary Christianity by sections of the lower castes changed only their religion, not the social status. The political struggle against the British rule in India was spearheaded by the high caste Hindus, and the British, partly out of belated concern for the downtrodden but

mainly to divide and divert the freedom struggle, gave special consideration to the low castes (Backward classes in the Govt of India Act 1935, when they were enumerated as Scheduled castes.) Under the constitution of Independent India, the lower castes have constitutional and legal equality with the upper castes. However they continue suffering from social disadvantages.

1.11. MARGINALITY

Socially the untouchables have no status in the Hindu social structure for they are ritually below the pollution line and therefore only marginal to it, perhaps beyond the system, although in practice they are integrated into the local Jati system in the villages through jajmani relationships - the exchange of goods and services among the various castes. Untouchables are always at the lower end, exploited and degraded. Economically, they are the poorest of the poor, toiling in the most degrading occupations. Predominantly rural, they have been mainly landless agricultural labourers held in varying degrees of 'bondedness' in different parts of the country.

Culturally, they were outside the Hindu sanskritic Great tradition and as parts of the preliterate local little tradition. Their social, economic and cultural marginality in the society is reflected and reinforced by their peripherality in the village settlement patterns: the upper and middle castes live in residentially better central parts of the village, the untouchables live on the outskirts of the village.

The scheduled castes are not a homogeneous category and yet they share the same disabilities and discriminations. There are internal variations and hierarchy among the various scheduled castes.

I have chosen Bhangis (the sweepers) of Delhi for my study. They are untouchables and are the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Bhangis have always been marginal to the society socially, economically as well as culturally. The scavenging occupation, socially the lowest of all hereditary occupations in India is associated with Bhangi caste. They are known by different names in various regions of India.

Bhangi caste, mostly concentrated in urban areas throughout India, lives segregated in big bastis, within the most crowded parts of cities and towns. The scavenging occupation is looked down upon with such detestation that scavengers living in the heart of the town are physically segregated and socially completely isolated. All the three aspects of untouchability seem to persist with regard to Bhangis even in urban areas. They remain untouchable, unapproachable and unseeable and are not allowed in the house except for scavenging. Even today they are the most exploited marginal groups in the society. The concept of Marginality has generally been used to describe inter-group relations and it implies some form of hierarchical ordering of groups and their members according to differentials of prestige, privilege and power.

Dickie Clark, interprets a "marginal situation as a special aspect of social hierarchy between groups that are either subordinate or superordinate to each other in power or prestige. What makes an hierarchical situation marginal in character is any inconsistency in the ranking of individual or collectivity in any matter regulated by the hierarchical structure." (Dickie Clark 1966; 185)

Marginality implies the position of groups in the social order and the nature of the barriers that separate them.

Cultural marginality exists when the belief and value system of a group is despised by others who are superordinate in status and power. In such situations, the despised groups may try to reduce the cultural barriers by acquiring some of the cultural symbols of superordinate groups. "If status and power differentials exist between people that are inter-related or if members of one or more of these groups are disadvantaged in one or more ways, or if there are social stigmas created by labels that symbolize social inferiority, the subordinates may change the labels of identification by acquiring some of the cultural possessions of the superordinates or they may become mobile and identify with a higher group." (Gist and Wright 1973; 30)

"Marginality presupposes some kind of "barrier" limiting or obstructing social interaction and cultural interchange between members of groups that are in some form of relationship with each other."

(The term "barrier" seems to have been first used by Kurt Lewin in his "Resolving Social Conflicts", New York, Harper and Brothers, 1948)

The barriers of caste, race and religion are most rigid. The concept of marginality has been applied to the study of racial minorities. The barriers of caste are equally rigid. These barriers have helped maintain social distances between groups in Indian society more so between untouchables and others. (higher castes and other low clean castes) As said earlier the untouchables themselves are not a homogeneous group. Each caste among untouchables has its own belief and value system, established behaviour pattern and social organisation.

In the case of the Bhangis occupying a marginal position in Hindu social order on almost all fronts - religious, social, economic and even spatial, the barriers have been most rigid. Having experienced deprivation over a considerable length of time as a result of exploitation they have retained separate-ness of identity. Rather, the deprivation has intensified a consciousness of identity. The concept of sociological identity has been particularly elaborated upon in materials dealing with various ethnic groups in the U.S. as well as in the discussion of racial groups. Fitzpatrick in his study of Puerto Rican Americans has referred to identity as "those points of reference whereby persons (or a group) define themselves in relation to the world and to other people: an

awareness of persons (or a group) of who they are and where they belong - the problem of identity has another dimension. It is related to the sense of group solidarity in the acceptance of certain values, goals or meanings." - (Fitzpatrick 1971: 7, 24)

The identity of the untouchables has been shaped by a range of socially imposed disabilities. Berreman calls it stigmatised ethnic identity and he points out.....

First, that stigmatized ethnic identity is experienced as oppression. It is a human day to day experience of degradation and exploitation, not simply an abstract concept.

Second, that people resent that identity and that experience regardless of the rationalizations offered for it.

Third, that people continually attempt to resist, alleviate or change that identity and experience.

Fourth, how people respond to stigmatized ethnic identity depends upon their definitions of themselves, of others and of the situations in which they interact.

I agree with Berreman's point of view that stigmatized ethnic identity is experienced as oppression and its consequences are resisted.

The political processes after independance like universal adult franchise, political representation for disadvantaged people and other provisions of the democratic constitution have enabled the erstwhile powerless communities to assert

themselves.

Taking Bhangis of Delhi as the marginal group I shall try to explore as to how the concept of stigmatised identity relates to them and their efforts to shed that identity; the identity crisis of the Bhangis manifesting itself in their struggles in political, economic and social fields; how far their marginality has receded with the politicisation process; what are the forces reinforcing their stigmatised identity and; the forces leading to the breakdown of the stigmatised identity.

NOTES

1. The 12 year Kumbh at the holy confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythological Sarasvati at Paryag Allahabad, also at Haridwar, when millions of Hindus, young and old take the holy dip in the waters at the 'sangam' - as well as other rivers at the appointed hour. Worship may be with or without the priest's help.
2. Dr. Radhakrishnan had in mind probably Islam and the Christian missionaries in India.
3. Both religion and philosophy inquire into the nature of life and of existence. Religion deals with reality through revelation and tradition and tries to solve the riddle of existence with reference to God. Philosophy depends on the full exercise of reason and thought and tries to find an explanation of existence and reality without reference to God. Hinduism solves this problem with reference both to religion and philosophy.
4. There is an interesting footnote to Yajna in Satyarth Prakash - Yajna is the application of the knowledge of the physical, chemical and physiological and the like properties of material substances and of psychological ones of mental substances. It therefore, generally requires the association of men and objects. "The word Yajna which originally indicates any action requiring association of men and objects, productive of beneficial results is always translated by European scholars as Sacrifice. The notion of sacrifice is a purely Christian notion and has no place in the Vedic philosophy. It is foreign to the genuine religion of India. Hence all translations in which the word sacrifice occurs are to be rejected as fallacious." "The Terminology of the Vedas and European Scholars." (S. Prakash P. 101)
5. The rate of interest was to vary between 3 to 16 percent per annum. When the debtor had paid back double of what was lent him, even the principal amount was considered as paid off.

6. In ancient India there were Arajaka states or states without a ruler - the ancient Hindu anarchism. Arjaka states were distinct from republics or "Gana Rajya" which means "rule of numbers or "rule by many."
7. Max Muller arbitrarily fixed the period of their composition between 1200 - 600 BC. From astronomical references in the text, Tilak (1893) and Jacobi (1893) independently of each other concluded that 4500 - 2500) BC was the period of composition (History of Philosophy Eastern and Western Vol. 1. P. 40). Before their composition (Smriti) the Vedic teachings were passed on by word of mouth (Shruti).
8. Ghurye evidently means, subcastes of the four major castes.
9. The Manu Smriti is the leading work on the sacred law of the Hindus. It is a metrical work of 2685 verses, though a few versions include some more. It contains the teachings of Manu expounded at his desire by his pupil Bhrigu to the sages who asked him for knowledge of the Dharma of all Varnas."The present text was apparently composed out of the earlier material passing under the name of Manu and was certainly revised once afterwards to bring it abreast of changed notions of morality. The revision may be dated between the second century BC and second century AD.... well over 250 verses of the Manu Smriti occur in the several sections of the Mahabharat, and many legends are common between the two works; it was long held that the Smriti borrowed from the epic".... but Kane in his History of Dharmasastra Vol. 1 pp 133-53, has shown. "The probability of the original draft of the Smriti having preceded the extant text of the Epic. On the other hand, the Smriti is much in advance of the early Dharma Shastras of Gautama, Baudhyana, and Apastamba, which must be placed at least some centuries earlier." K.A. Nilakanta Shastri, in History of Philosophy Vol. 1. Page 7.
10. Paraiyan, or the Tamil unapproachable, has given the word pariah to the English language.

CHAPTER 2

DELHI CITY AND BHANGIS

2.1. PHYSICAL SETTING

Delhi, the historical capital of the subcontinent of India is situated in the western half of the Indus-Gangetic plain. This fertile plain is bounded in the North by the lofty Himalayas; in the South by Vindhaya and Satpura Hills which are overgrown with dense forests and separate North India from the Deccan; in the East by the eastern offshoots of the Himalayas, the Assam Hills (hills by Himalayan scale) which are covered with almost impenetrable jungle; in the west by the western offshoots of Himalayas, namely, the Sulaiman and the Kirthar range. They are not very high and are dry and barren. They also are interspersed with the well known mountain passes of Khyber, Kurram, Tochi, Balari etc. Through these passes have descended into the sub-continent, invaders from central Asia and beyond, Aryans, Greeks, Iranians, Sythians, Huns, Turks, Mongols, Afghans, etc. Invaders had to pass through the former North-West Frontier Province and the Panjab to conquer the Gangetic plain. Westward of Delhi is the waterless Indian desert (Rajasthan desert) reclaimed in part by canals in recent years.

Delhi lies in latitude $28^{\circ} 38'$ North and longitude $77^{\circ} 13'$ East. The mean elevation of the city is upward of 700 feet above sea level. Bombay and Calcutta are about 960 miles from Delhi by railway. Bombay is southwest of Delhi and Calcutta is eastward.

The lofty Himalayas have a tremendous influence on the climate of North India including Delhi. On the one hand, these mountains keep out the severe cold winds which blow from Central Asia and Tibet during winter. On the other, they capture the moisture laden monsoon blowing from the Indian Ocean, causing heavy rain from June to September. Because of the Rajasthan desert, Delhi's climate in April to June is drier and dustier than it otherwise would be.

Delhi is situated on the western bank of river Jamuna (Sanskrit: Yamuna). The river which starts in the eternal snows of the Himalayas, enters the Gangetic plain from the north and flows southwards. Yamuna is a sacred river, its sanctity next only to river Ganges (Ganga) and greater than that of river Sarasvati ----- the last of the trio is the lost river of the Vedic lore.

The land to the west of the river-the site of Delhi-is on a higher level than the land on the eastern bank.¹ But further up north, beyond the small town Wazirabad, the land on the west is as low as on the eastern bank (Where Shahdara is situated) and during severe monsoon floods, all that area also gets submerged in flood water as do parts of Shahdara.

Delhi is surrounded by Haryana and Uttar Pradesh states. Main roads from these states converge on Delhi. It is at points along these main roads that the boundary lines of the metropolitan city will be placed. Taking Townhall in Chandni chowk

as the centre of Greater Delhi for the present study, these points are: Mukherjee Nagar on Wazirabad Road in the North; Mahrauli on Delhi-Mathura Road in the South; Shahdara town in the East; Paschim Puri on Rohtak Road in the West; Palam on Gurgaon Road in the South-west; Kalkaji, Okhla on Mathura Road in South-East. Delhi's outer open space or green belt is falling prey to the town planners. The open spaces within the Metropolitan area are not many and are mostly in New Delhi. The neighbourhood parks are small or circular road junctions.

2.2. FLORA AND FAUNA

Delhi, as most of North India, is on the hot desert belt in the Northern hemisphere. That the Indian desert has not extended to the greater part of North India is due primarily to the Himalayan mountains which contain and capture the monsoon winds. Delhi receives about 40" of rainfall annually, most of it from the end of June to the end of September. The climate is torrid hot from April to June. With this type of climate, xerophytic types of thorny trees and bushes are found on the Delhi Ridge. One such tree is Kikkar (*Acacia Arabica*) from which gum Arabic is obtained. A tall grass called 'Jhund' grows on the slopes of the Ridge. Some poorer classes of people use this grass for thatching. Other trees are the sub-tropical species like Jamun, Neem, mango

etc. The river Yamuna abounds in fish. On the gently sloping freshly silted banks and on the larger islets are grown a variety of vegetables. Ancestors of some Bhangis (Sweepers) the subject of my study, used to work as casual labourers on the vegetable farms. That was three generations back. I shall deal with this in a subsequent chapter. Dhobis (washermen) wash clothes on the banks of the river.

Among the fauna is a large population of ubiquitous crows, kites, parrots, and water fowl on the the banks of river Yamuna. Until mid fifties one could hear the howl of the jackal at night on the Ridge. There were reports of hyenas prowling in the darkness. Rapid urbanisation during the last twenty years has drastically reduced the number of Jackals and virtually driven away the hyenas.

2.3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Delhi, the Indraprastha of epic Mahabhartar, the renowned city of Pandavas, was probably founded in 1500 BC. The generally held belief is that Purana Kila (The old fort) is the site of Indraprastha.

According to the Adi-Puran of Mahabhartar, Indraprastha was a well planned garden city with wide streets, with towers and palatial buildings, with lakes full to the brim with crystal clear water. Even allowing for the poetic imagination in the Epic, Delhi probably was wetter and greener than it is today. The surrounding countryside was covered with forests which caused precipitation and rain, and the Indian desert was

further to the West.

The original founders of the city, the Pandavas, did not stay long. When a fly was found in the food of the eldest Pandav, King Yudhisthira, the Pandavas interpreted it as a bad omen indicating the eclipse of their dynasty and abandoned the city. (Does it signify that flies were rare in epic times? Perhaps. After all, Indraprastha was a well planned city. Or, may be, it is only the Indian mind harking back to the good old times. Like caste division, Indians have fourfold division of the epochs of mankind. Pandavas the founders of Indraprastha, lived in Dwapra Yuga or the second epoch which was descent from the Satya Yuga or the Vedic epoch of truth and piety).

The present name Delhi (Delhi or Dilli according to local inhabitants) was given by Raja Dilu or Dhilu, a member of the Mauryan dynasty who founded a city after his name on a site near the enigmatic Iron Pillar standing near Qutab Minar. (A Cunningham: Archeological Survey of India Vol 1. P. 141)

The Mauryan dynasty reigned over North India and part of Afghanistan during 322 BC - 185 BC. The dynasty included the great king Ashoka. These facts are local legend in Delhi and are generally accepted as true by scholars.

The Mauryan Empire had its capital in Patliputra near the modern Patna, the capital of Bihar state. The empires that

followed had the Imperial capital in Patliputra or elsewhere, but not in Delhi. In the middle of the 11th century AD, Delhi was ruled by the Tomara or Tanwar dynasty founded by Anangpal. The last king of this dynasty was Anangpal II. He had no son and therefore, he left the kingdom of Delhi to his daughter's son, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the king of Ajmer. He was the last Rajput Hindu ruler of India. He was defeated by Muhammed Ghori, the Afghan ruler, in 1192, and Delhi passed onto Muslims. The Afghan or Pathan period was from 1206 AD to 1526 AD. The era is known as the Sultanate of Delhi; Delhi was the capital of empire except for the brief period when Muhammed Tughlak moved the capital to Deogiri in central India. These Pathan rulers sometimes built their citadels a few miles South or West of Chauhan Dilli, but Dilli continued to flourish. Ibrahim Lodhi, the last Pathan ruler of India was defeated by Babur, the founder of Moghul Empire, in 1526. Delhi continued to be the capital of Moghul Empire under Babur and his son Humayun.

After Humayun's death "for nearly a century Delhi once more sank to the level of a provincial town. Akbar and his son Jahangir, from AD 1556 to AD 1627, resided in Agra and Lahore respectively, neglecting the city completely. It was given as an estate to Sayyad Kamal, the son of a Bokhara noble." (Bopegamage 1957; 7)

Jahangir's son Khurram succeeded to the Moghul throne in 1627 assuming the title of Shahjahan. He transferred the capital

from Agra to Delhi. His walled city roughly comprised the present Old Delhi and the suburbs spread towards present New Delhi. On the Eastern side of the city almost overlooking the river, Shahjahan built his imperial palace, the Red Fort. In the heart of the city on a raised ground, he built the imposing Jama Masjid.

The physical outline of the city has constantly changed. During the Moghul times, suburbs had sprung up outside the walled city, along the banks of Yamuna in the North and South-West. Away to the South lay the ruins of earlier Delhis. The $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles long lofty wall still remains, but out of the 14 gates which existed during the last days of the Moghuls, only four now remain, the others were blocked up. The existing gates are:-

- (1) Kashmiri gate on the North side.
- (2) Lahori gate on the West.
- (3) Ajmeri gate on the South West.
- (4) Delhi gate on the South.

Emperor Shahjahan, the builder of Taj Mahal at Agra also built Lal Quila (Red Fort) and Jama Masjid (The great mosque) in Delhi, Red Fort which was the Moghul imperial palace is now a military fort. Chandni Chowk is still the principal thoroughfare and starts opposite the Red Fort. The Jama Masjid is 2 furlongs South of Chandni Chowk and the railway station the same distance North of Chandni Chowk.

2.4. BRITISH PERIOD

Before 1857, Delhi like the rest of India, was under the rule

of East India company. The British, as East India company, defeated the Marathas in 1803, and took Delhi under their protection. Bahadur Shah, the old Moghul Emperor, was confined to the Red Fort and was a pensioner of East India company. After 1st November, 1858, on Proclamation of Queen Victoria, India passed on to the direct rule of Britain.

In 1863, by a Panjab government notification under the Municipal Act, the Delhi Municipality was created to look after public health and convenience. In 1881, it became a first class municipality. By the beginning of the 20th century, Delhi city municipality comprised the old city of the Moghuls (Shahjahanabad) and suburbs such as Sabzimandi, Sadar Bazar, Paharganj, Basti Rehgarpura and Karol Bagh. North of the city were the Viceregal Lodge and Secretariat (now the Lt. Governor's residence and Old Secretariat). The English and other Europeans lived in this area called the Civil Lines. This area was placed under the administration of a Notified Area committee formed in 1913.

In the year 1911, the British government announced the transfer of the capital of the Indian Empire from Calcutta to Delhi, which not only had geographically central position but also glorious historical associations. The new capital of India - New Delhi - contiguous to the site of the epic Indraprastha was planned by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker; 29,000 builders worked for 18 years and it cost 15 crores of rupees (£10 million), many decades before the word inflation came to be used in economics. It

was a city of gardens and excellent roads and was built to accommodate a population of about half a lakh (50,000). In the centre of the new city was Connaught Place, New Delhi's retail business centre. About two miles of unbuilt area was deliberately left separating New Delhi and the old city. This gap is gradually narrowing. Delhi gate - Ajmeri gate area is now multi storey built up area, mainly occupied by large scale commercial enterprises. This high rise multi-storey development serves the multi purpose of high rents and high walls that cuts off the ugly view of the old inner city.

Until the early British times in India, most of the imperial cities were enclosed by high walls. Officers of state, merchants and craftsmen had their big and small houses in the walled cities. These thick walls gave the people protection from raiders. The houses of the rich were along the main thoroughfares of the city; the poor were concentrated along the margins or outskirts of the main habitation, but still within the walls. Delhi which has remained the capital of India for the greater part of India's history had a tendency to spread beyond the walled area. Moreover, there was not one Delhi but seven ancient and ruined cities stretching for over fifteen miles on the great plain which lies between the Ridge and the river Yamuna. No king could possibly have enclosed the whole vast area within walls. Delhi, thus always had its suburbs, stretching away from its heart.

2.5. OLD DELHI

With rapid urbanisation many cities have partly lost their walled structure. The walled city of old Delhi dating from the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (17th century) has been able to preserve its walls to some extent. But only four of the original fourteen gates remain. These are Kashmiri gate on the North side, Delhi gate on the South, Ajmeri gate on the South West and Lahori gate on the West. These may fall to the caprice of India's rulers if they, in their periodic campaigns of 'cleanliness' and modernisation pull down these remnants of a bygone age, so that Old Delhi may look more presentable to the foreign visitors and tourists³. That the remaining gates still stand may be due less to change of heart on the part of the rulers and more to the practical consideration that the foreign tourists do want to see the old India. However, the heavy vehicular traffic passing through these gates will gradually shake them to their foundations.

A quick survey of Old Delhi would be worthwhile. The Moghul citadel, the Red Fort, is the centre of attraction. To quote W.S. Caine: Picturesque India, London 1898, pp 122-125. "The Imperial Palace (The Red Fort).... in its glory, was probably the most splendid palace in the world. As its massive and lofty red-sandstone walls, towers, and noble gateway burst upon the view on entering the Maidan in front, it is as impressive as the first sight of Windsor Castle from the Thames." After describing in some detail the beauty of various buildings inside the Fort, Caine laments the Vandalism

perpetrated by various invaders. "These and other glories of the palace, have all been swept away by successive barbarians, Nadirshah, Ahmed Khan, and the Maratha Chiefs were content to strip the buildings of their precious metals and Jewelled thrones; to the government of the present Empress of India was left the last dregs of vandalism, which after the mutiny, pulled these perfect monuments of Moghul art, to make room for the ugliest buildings from Simla to Ceylon." The military barracks were built in 1859 for British infantry and artillery. To give the guns an unrestricted line of fire, buildings and streets, even mosques, were demolished on the high ground between Netaji Subhash Road and Jama Masjid. This area is now partly occupied by the southern side of Lajpat Rai market. The rest is a park, now known as Netaji Subhash Park. These days there are no guns mounted on the rampart of the Red Fort. After the Mutiny of 1857, the guns faced the city, understandably. Now on Independence Day - 15th August, loudspeakers, some mounted on the wall, face the assemblage of people.

Facing the Red Fort are Jama Masjid and Chandni Chowk. The Jama Masjid is without rival among mosques and stands on a rocky feature. Chandni Chowk - "Moonlit Silver Square" is the name of the main thoroughfare which starts opposite the Red Fort and runs upto Fatehpuri Masjid in the West. The street is about a mile long and about 150 feet wide. The street dates back from the Moghul times. Then there were two other main streets: a road to Jama Masjid which was destroyed after the Mutiny of 1857. The other road was the

present Netaji Subhash Marg (previously Faiz Bazar Road; Elgin Road in British times). Netaji Subhash Marg is part of the road which ran to Delhi Gate at the Southern end of Daryaganj. These were the three main thoroughfares in mid 19th century. There were, as at present, numerous small streets radiating from these thoroughfares into the heart of the city. For the present study, I need to explore a little further the character of the old city as it has changed - and remained comparatively unchanged - since the Moghul times. Around the Red Fort there was a garden with shrubs and flowers. Now there is only a large green park known as Maidan, planted with trees. The Maidan, at most times of the year, is a gathering place for all sorts of people. Itinerant jugglers, fortune tellers, snack sellers, earn their living here. Across the road, on the Netaji Subhash Marg, the travelling circus pitches the high top once a year.

India's Prime Ministers need to address the Delhi populace from the ramparts of Red Fort on Independence Day, 15th August. Flowers beds will take up space meant for the audience. A cynic might call it the annual political circus. Netaji Subhash Marg, which is a dual carriageway, is a busy road as it links North Delhi with New Delhi. Traffic rushes smoothly. Across the road is Chandni Chowk. Chandni Chowk has seen many changes since Moghul times. Down its middle used to run a canal. The English filled it up and paved it with cobblestones for the pedestrians. This footpath was shaded by 'neem' and 'pipal' trees. When the trams came to

Delhi, the footpath in the middle of Chandni Chowk gave place to tramway. Two footpaths, one on each side of the road, were constructed. The tramways were dismantled in the mid-fifties. A clock tower standing at about the halfway point of the road collapsed in 1951⁴. This clock tower was 128 feet high and was built by the municipality at a cost of only Rs 25,000.

In Moghul times, Chandni Chowk street was flanked on both sides by single - stor^eyed shops, which were business-cum-residence, the shop-keepers lived at the rear of the shops. High ranking officers and the nobility had their mansions in this locality. Ordinary state officials lived in the narrow lanes around Chandni Chowk. The population of the city rose to 200,000. The suburbs in the South were mostly inhabited by the poor. (Now South Delhi is dotted with suburbs of the rich). Caravans brought merchandise from far away places. With the decline of Moghul power, chaos descended on Delhi. First the Marathas and then the Persians. The latter under Nadir Shah sacked the city for two months and before departing razed the city, in 1731. For the next sixty years Delhi was prey to civil war and invasions, until in 1803 the British defeated the Marathas and took over Delhi. The British brought peace and stability and Delhi not only regained its prosperity but also developed beyond recognition. This was the result of the advent of railways and the expansion of trade and commerce. Calcutta was linked to Delhi by railway in 1867 - ten years after the Mutiny - and Panjab and Sindh railways, too entered Delhi the same year. Seven years later,

Bombay and Delhi had a rail link. The Calcutta - Delhi railway enters the city by a rail-cum-road bridge over the Yamuna. The railway lines from the West enter from near Lahori gate. Delhi railway station is about a quarter of a mile North of Chandni Chowk.

During this period, 'pucca' or hard surface roads were built to link Delhi with other parts of India. The first modern industry was set up in the seventies of the 19th century. It was a factory to manufacture small sugar-cane crushers for individual farmers. Some years afterwards along the Grand Trunk Road on the West of Delhi, four smoke belching mills sprang up. There were two cotton mills, a flour mill and a biscuit factory. The first three still exist in the very busy Bara Hindu Rao and Sabzi Mandi areas. Modern industrial development received further impetus after the shifting of the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911; during the second World War, 1939-45; and, especially, since 1947. As Delhi developed and grew since the eighties of the last century, it expanded and absorbed the neighbouring villages. The process continues.

Greater Delhi today is not one but several-in-one. It is Indraprastha of Mahabharata (Old fort - New Delhi); it is Shahjahanabad (Red fort, Chandni Chowk and the surrounding area), and as Delhi grows beyond Qutab and Mehrauli in the South, towards Faridabad in the South East and Gurgaon in the South West, it has already encompassed all the old historical sites of various Delhis and may, in course of

time, when it spreads North Westward, embrace Kurukshetra, the sleepy pilgrimage town of the Mahabhartta fame.

This growth has been in phases: "slow up to 1931, a watershed at 1941, and very flat in the last two decades for the urban areas and an average of 1 percent increase for each of the fifty years in its rural areas. From a little over 200,000 in 1901, urban Delhi grew by slow degrees to a mere 450,000 in 1931, but took a sudden leap to 700,000 in 1941, more than doubled itself thereafter in ten years to 1.44 million in 1951, and on by two-thirds as much again to 2.4 million in 1961" (Mitra 1970; 7).

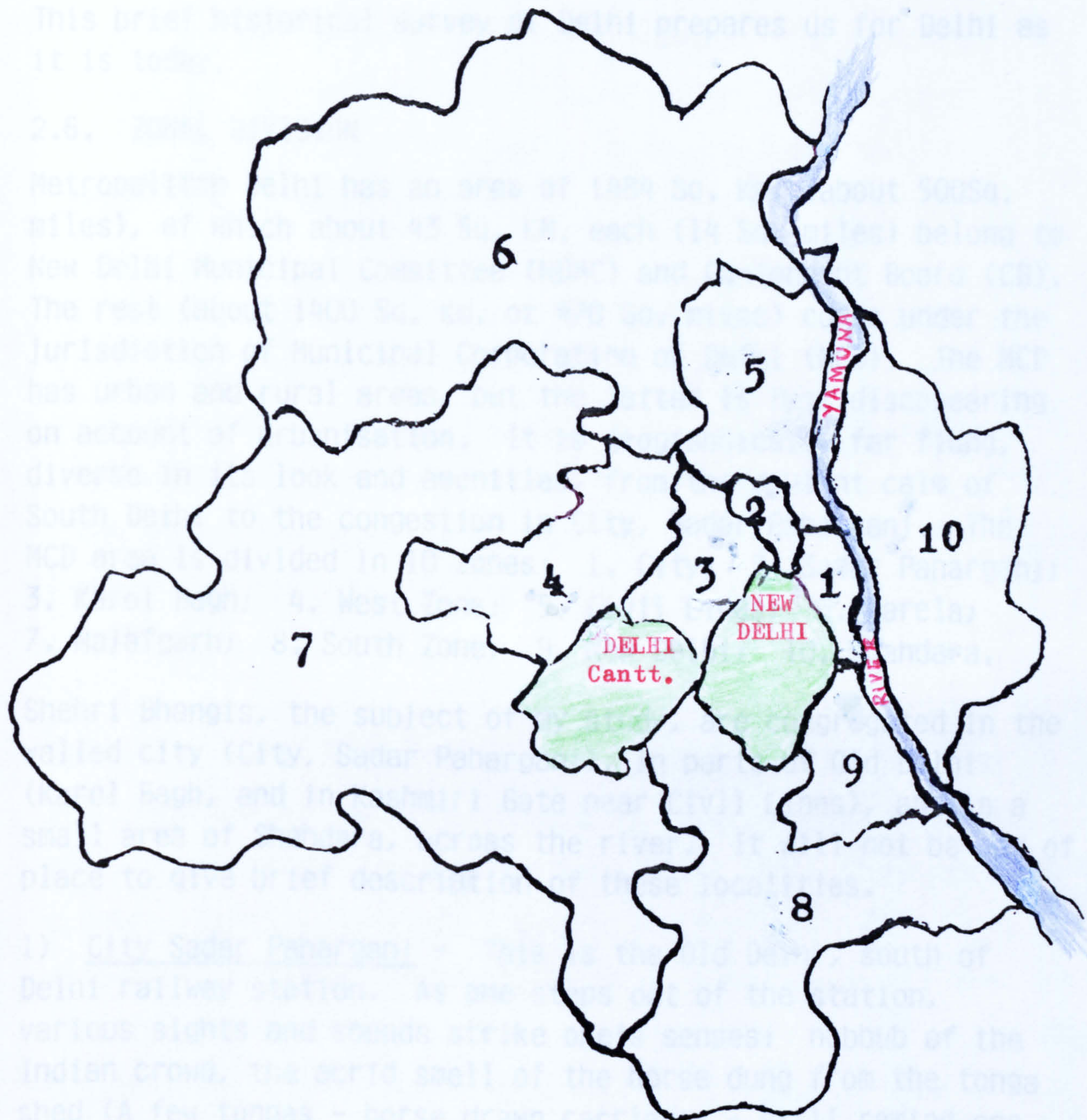
The first leap in growth (1941) was more of population than of urban area and was due to the exigencies of the Second World War, when hundreds of temporary hutments were built in New Delhi. Following the partition of British India into Pakistan and India, Delhi changed in size and character. The avalanche of enterprising Hindus and sikh refugees from (West) Pakistan urban areas converged on Delhi. Some occupied houses of Delhi Muslims who had left for Pakistan. The majority, however, were given shelter in camps: the three bigger ones were at Kingsway, Tibbia college in Karol Bagh and at Shahdara East of Yamuna river. The Rehabilitation Ministry, headed by a minister, Mr. Mehar Chand Khanna, himself a refugee from (West) Pakistan, built townships for the camp dwelling refugees. The townships, a little hastily conceived, did not turn out to be very good. They are one-room tenements.

They are in groups of two storey quadrangles around a central open space; the number of family units is upto forty in each quadrangle. The space allotted per family is very limited: one 15' x 12' room, with an adjoining small kitchen and a small enclosure off the kitchen facing the central open space. (This small enclosure is an enclosed balcony on the first floor). Access to the house is straight into the room from the small enclosure on the ground floor and from the common corridor-cum-balcony on the first floor. Two generations of ex-refugee families have lived in these cramped conditions. Some have moved out to other areas of Delhi in bigger and better houses, rented or owned, but the rents and land prices being what they are, not many of the ex-refugees can afford to move out in better accommodation.

However, these people try to present order and careful arrangement in the one-room tenements. Then there were three-storey multiple flats, privately constructed. Both the Rehabilitation Ministry 'houses' and the privately constructed flats are now in owner occupation.

These townships are in four areas: in the North, Kingsway camp extending to Timarpur, Roop Nagar, Kamla Nagar, Jawahar Nagar and Shakti Nagar; in the South, Lalpat Nagar, Malviya Nagar, and Nizamuddin; in the West, Patel Nagar, Moti Nagar; in the East, Gandhi Nagar in Shahdara across the river. The old city, and its immediate environs were virtually taken over by the refugees.

ZONAL MAP OF DELHI



1. CITY

2. SADAR PAHAR GANJ

3. KAROL BAGH

4. WEST ZONE

5. CIVIL LINES

6. NARELA

7. NAJAFGARH

8. SOUTH ZONE

9. NEW DELHI

10. SHAHDARA

This brief historical survey of Delhi prepares us for Delhi as it is today.

2.6. ZONAL DIVISION

Metropolitan Delhi has an area of 1484 Sq. Km. (about 500 Sq. miles), of which about 43 Sq. Km. each (14 Sq. miles) belong to New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) and Cantonment Board (CB). The rest (about 1400 Sq. Km. or 470 Sq. miles) comes under the Jurisdiction of Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). The MCD has urban and rural areas, but the latter is fast disappearing on account of urbanisation. It is geographically far flung, diverse in its look and amenities, from the opulent calm of South Delhi to the congestion in City, Sadar Paharganj. The MCD area is divided in 10 zones: 1. City; 2. Sadar Paharganj; 3. Karol Bagh; 4. West Zone; 5. Civil Lines; 6. Narela; 7. Najafgarh; 8. South Zone; 9. New Delhi; 10. Shahdara.

Shehri Bhangis, the subject of my study, are congregated in the walled city (City, Sadar Paharganj), in parts of Old Delhi (Karol Bagh, and in Kashmiri Gate near Civil Lines), and in a small area of Shahdara, across the river. It will not be out of place to give brief description of these localities.

1) City Sadar Paharganj - This is the Old Delhi, south of Delhi railway station. As one steps out of the station, various sights and sounds strike one's senses: hubbub of the Indian crowd, the acrid smell of the horse dung from the tonga shed (A few tongas - horse drawn carriages - still remind one of a bygone time), the red Post Office vans, the yellow and black taxis, cars and lorries overtaking one another on the Shyama Prasad Mukerjee Marg⁵. This road runs parallel to a park to the south of which is the Town Hall. There are two libraries in this area: one opposite the railway station is Delhi Public Library. It is a barrack - like brick structure. In the fifties, the library was at the height of its newly established freshness. Since then the books have lost their original bindings. The books are relatively recent publications. The other library, re-named Hardayal Library,

formerly known as Harding Library, owned by the Municipal Corporation, is in the eastern part of the park, almost behind the Delhi Public Library. Here are kept, behind locked glass fronted almirahs, old and out of print books.

The Town Hall building which dates back from the British times is solidly built, but is small for the affairs of a sprawling capital city. Inside there is the usual hum of activity. The main entrance of the Town Hall faces Chandni Chowk which runs east-west, south of it. From here, the Red Fort and Jama Masjid are within a radius of a little over a quarter of a mile.

Chandni Chowk is the principal thoroughfare of ShahJahan's Delhi and one of the main streets of Delhi. Until about 85 years ago, Chandni Chowk shops were "full of cashmere shawls, chadars, kincobs, brocades, gold and silver embroidery, wonderful loom work, pottery, weapons, armour, and all the other artistic melangerie for which India is famous." (Caine 1899; 127)⁶. There used to be also machine-made household goods imported from England and Japan⁷. The handicrafts have all but disappeared from Chandni Chowk shops which now are the outlet for Indian factory made consumer articles from cloth to cutlery. The fierce competition among shopkeepers is evident from the displays jutting out of the open shop fronts: blankets, shawls, sarees, linen, readymade garments and so on. The dwindling shop touts carry on the centuries old trade of luring the prospective buyer into a particular shop. Wherever possible, a corner of the shop



1. Chandni Chowk - the main street.
2. Chandni Chowk - The Shopping Centre.

front is let to someone willing to run business that is different from the shop owner's line of business. For instance, a saree shop may have a pens and torches cubicle in the corner of the shop front. The shops open on the pavements which are roofed over corridors for most of the length of Chandni Chowk. The street is the battleground for the traffic entering Chandni Chowk from four directions: in the east, the Red Fort entrance for traffic coming from South Delhi and New Delhi, and also from Kashmiri Gate and Civil lines area in the north; in the west, the Fatehpuri entrance for traffic from West Delhi; the railway station (east end and west end) traffic enters through Mahatma Gandhi Park (Queen's park) and the Fatehpuri entrance. While the street is choked with a bewildering variety of traffic - cars, lorries, scooters, bicycles and carts - throngs of people walk on the pavements, where every few yards the pedestrian has to dodge a street vendor, selling the usual wares like garments, ribbons, pens, purses, cosmetics and combs. The Bhangi may be seen sweeping the rubbish of the Indian street, not the old newspapers which have a re-usable re-saleable value, but the small items like empty cigarette cartons and match boxes, paper bags, peanut shells in winter (groundnuts in India), orange and banana peelings as very few cows are around, these days.

Chandni Chowk, which was fit for its founder, Shahjahan's processions, is not spacious enough for coping with the present day city centre traffic which is a conglomerate of cars and carts. The Town Hall is hemmed in and overshadowed



1. Haphazard traffic.

2. The Town Hall.

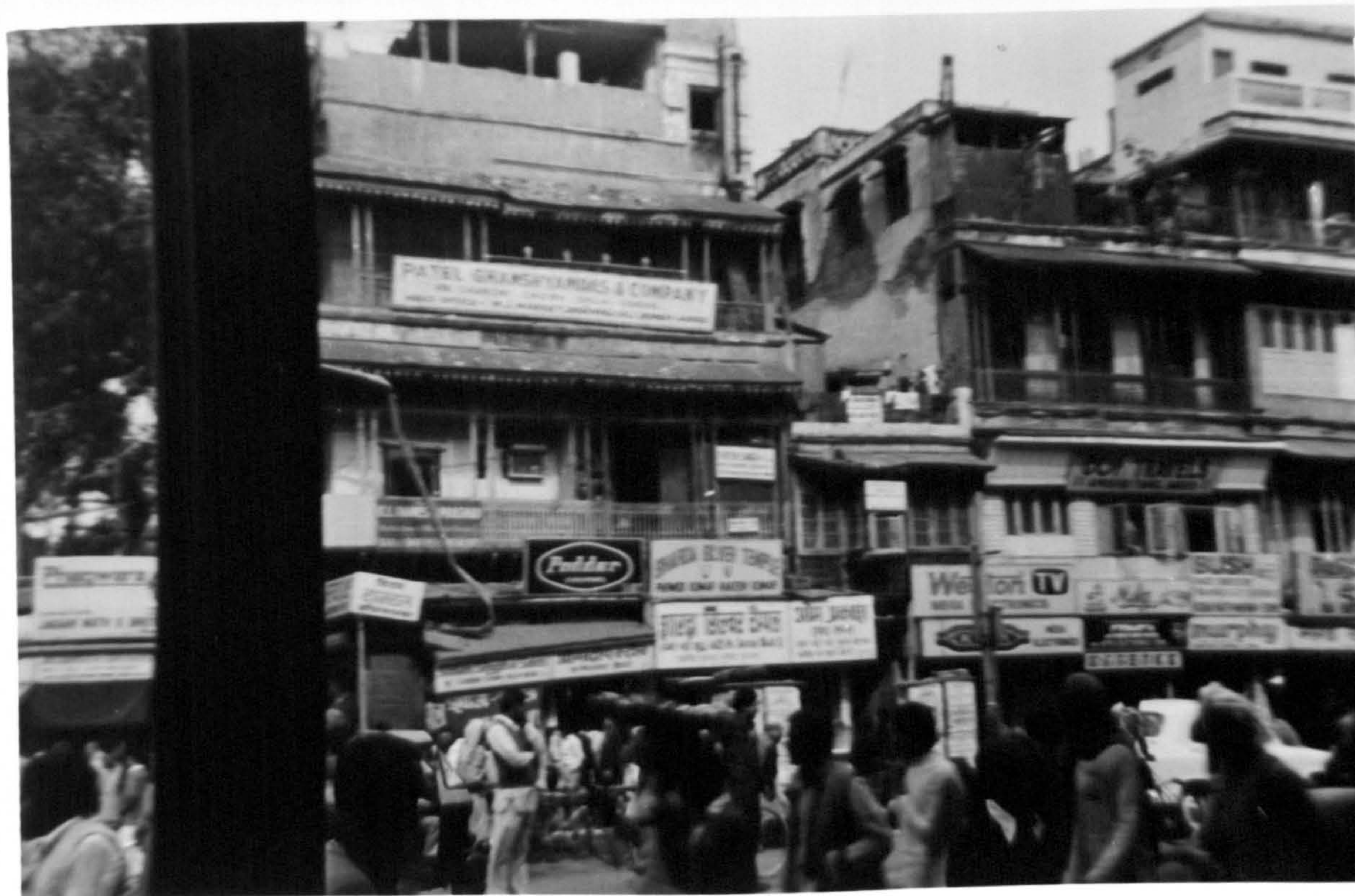
by other buildings, which are privately owned. These buildings, like the others in Chandni Chowk street, are old. Some have renovated fronts which have no reference to any architectural continuity. These buildings have outlived their useful time and the whole area looks worn out and dilapidated.

Southward of Chandni Chowk and parallel to it is Chowri Bazar, east of which is Esplanade Road which links Chandni Chowk with Jama Masjid and the area beyond. Until a few years back, on Esplanade Road was Delhi's bicycle market. West of Chowri Bazar is Lalkuan Bazar which connects Khari Baoli with Hauz Kazi. Ajmeri gate is about half a mile south of Hauz Kazi.

Chandni Chowk and Chowri Bazar have link roads, the main ones being: Dariba Kalan (which is the goldsmith's market of Delhi), Ballimaran and Nai Sarak (which means New Road but is old. It is historically new compared to Dariba Kalan and Ballimaran). Nai Sarak (now Amirchand Marg) has shops dealing in books, stationery, musical instruments and footwear. There is one antiquarian book shop, halfway down - actually up the sloping street - on the western side.

There are eighteen 'Katras' between Chandni Chowk and Chowri Bazar where retail business in cloth materials, grain and other goods is located.

Katras are the unplanned residential-cum-business areas in



1. Katras of Old City.

2. Residential-cum-business areas.

the innermost parts of the inner city in most Indian cities. Each katra in Delhi comprises a group of large buildings, three or more storeys high. There are 15-20 rooms on each floor. The ground floor is used as shops or godowns, rooms on the second floor are rented to banks and commercial firms. The remaining floors are rented to lawyers, doctors or are used as residence. These buildings stand shoulder to shoulder and back to back. Only the rooms in the outer part of the building receive natural light and have some ventilation. The rooms on the upper floors have an overhanging balcony or a verandah running from end to end of the building. Access to the upper floors is by steep, narrow, stairways. The buildings are about 100 years old.

Buildings in Chandni Chowk itself are also of the Katra type. The Katra - like houses provide living space for countless families in this part of Old Delhi. The rooms are dark and cramped, the streets below narrow and winding and open space for children to play is a far cry. The only greenery may be an odd peepal tree in a shrine, struggling to grow towards the far away sky. In these rabbit warrens of Katras, lanes and by-lanes, some less than four feet wide, with three-storey buildings on both sides, there is twilight at noon. And even though Delhi is situated in latitude $28\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N. (only 5° North of the Tropic of Cancer, which passes through central India), some of the very narrow lanes of Old Delhi do not see the sun even on 21st June. Many parts of this zone are without flush latrines and the Bhangis remove the night soil in a steel pan; the wheel barrow is too wide for some of the very narrow

lanes. This part of Delhi belongs to a past age when, for reasons of security, people preferring to live within the city walls, had a limited space for houses.

In a country like India with its enormous population pressure, there is the ever increasing demand on land for farming and for building. But Chandni Chowk and its environs, are a blight. Geographically this part of Delhi is the hub of the metropolis. So far, it has held it sway in the commercial field. However, it is totally inadequate for the needs of the modern times. The only proper solution is to pull it down and build it anew. The historical sites and landmarks too, need open space around them. Delhi administration has shown its capability in rejuvenating the old Fort and turning it into beautiful zoological gardens. There is no dearth of town planners, architects, civil engineers and skilled labour to plan and build a new Old Delhi.

From the Fatehpuri Masjid end in the West, Chandni Chowk runs through Khari-Baoli up to Lahori gate. This area specializes in wholesale/retail business in grains, nuts, edible oils etc. Beyond is Sadar Bazar which is the wholesale market for crockery and hosiery goods and then onward to Bara Hindu Rao. South of Sadar Bazar is Paharganj Which is the last southward limit of Old Delhi.

In all these areas the houses are old and the streets narrow. This is mainly low income residential area. The dwellings are single room. Some lanes are so narrow that if two persons

approach from opposite directions one has to stand flat against the wall or wait in a doorway to let the other person pass.

In these areas of Old Delhi, too, although underground sewerage exists, many houses lack flush latrines and the Bhangi does his unpleasant job in a very unpleasant way.

Having described the ecology of inner area of Old Delhi in some detail, I now turn briefly to the rest of Greater Delhi, including other parts of Old Delhi (which concern my thesis) and the post - 1947 Delhi for comparison regarding working conditions of Bhangis.

2) Civil Lines - Sabzi Mandi - These two areas of Delhi are very dissimilar in appearance. Civil Lines, as the name indicates is of British origin; Sabzi Mandi (literally: vegetable market) of Indian origin, in fact, it was a suburb of Shahjahan's Delhi. Until 1976, Delhi's wholesale fruit and vegetable market was in Sabzi Mandi, below the Ridge. This market is now located in New Sabzi Mandi, about five miles to the West.

The present Civil Lines is the triangular area roughly North and North West of Kashmiri gate, with its apex in the North - Quadsia gardens and Nicholson Park separates Shahjahan's Delhi from the Civil Lines; the British left these open spaces "to ward off contamination from the native city." Now these parks are a welcome sight in Old Delhi which has perhaps the least park space per 1000 population in any capital city of the world.

The Civil Lines area is about 4 miles long and 2½ miles wide at its widest. In the east, it is bounded by Yamuna river and in the west, by Rajpur Road. The Mall or Mall Road was a common feature of all British Indian Civil Lines and Cantonment towns. The Mall of Delhi Civil Lines starts from Metcalfe House⁸ near Yamuna river, runs in the east-west direction, cuts across Rajpur Road and, at the Magazine Road Junction, turns Westward upto Najafgarh Drain, where it joins Karnal Road. South of the westward section of Mall Road is Delhi university. In this part of Delhi, the Ridge lies both north and south of Mall Road. On a southern promontory of the Ridge near Sabzi Mandi is Ashoka Pillar and on a nearby higher slope, is the 110 feet high Mutiny Memorial⁹ which the British built. One can view a large part of Delhi from the top of this Memorial. The jungle covered Ridge¹⁰ spreads north, south and east in gentle slopes which the Delhi Municipal corporation has developed into a natural park of considerable attraction.

In Civil Lines are the large bungalow type houses. Many date from the period after the Mutiny, when this area was taken over by the British for residential purpose. "Some of the well known standing specimens of these types (class IV)¹¹ are the Ludlow Castle and the Metcalfe House (These two were built before the Mutiny). These houses are big, and the presence of either gothic arches or classical colonnade is a special feature of their architecture. Some houses contain a central chamber surrounded by spacious rooms. It is said that these central chambers were formerly used for dancing parties.

There is a spacious garden in each house. The majority of these houses now are occupied by upper income group and some are used for Delhi State Government offices." (Bopegamage 1957; 73) As to Sabzi Mandi, it again is not one area but several. The low income houses are in the general vicinity of the cloth mills of the British days. There are the houses for the refugees described on page 68, two railway colonies and several areas of three-storey flats built in the fifties. These flats are owned/occupied by middle income people. There are also terraced/detached large houses owned/occupied by the owner family with or without tenants in self-contained portions of the houses. Apart from greenery in the railway colonies and small gardens attached to the individual large houses, there is hardly any lawn space in the built up area. Luckily, these houses are open, front and back. An attempt was made by the Corporation to provide landscaped small circular parks at intersection of roads. However, these are not popular as they are small and are not well kept. These houses are built on the flat pattern, each flat containing two/three rooms occupied by one family. These houses/flats are owned/occupied by doctors, lawyers, college lecturers, government officials and owners of small businesses. There are retail shops within convenient walking distance. Most people employ part-time domestic help, mainly housewives of labouring classes.

Similar middle income residential areas are in other parts of Greater Delhi, situated generally on the outer side of the low income residential areas. These middle income people have

privately built flats (in recent years, D.D.A. or Delhi Development Authority flats. D.D.A. is a public body), as well as privately owned 3/4 room houses. These houses are of improved modern design, open front and back, with small lawns. These houses are on 150 to 200 square yard plots. Most of these houses are single-storey type with provision for adding at least one storey when the sons grow up and have their own families.

There are houses for the top government officials. These are 4-6 room houses with gardens and are mostly in New Delhi; some are in Civil Lines for high ranking officials of Delhi Administration. In British times, these houses had resident Bhangis. Large, new houses are in South Delhi colonies like Greater Kailash, South Extension, SafdarJang Enclave, Friends Colony, Defence Colony, owned by neo-rich class. These are built on plots of 250 squares yards to 1500 square yards, most of the plot is built-up area, the idea being to rent out various self contained portions, or to apportion them to growing sons.

Delhi's attempt to Hindi-ise¹² place names seems to have given immunity to suburbs of the rich which, as shown above, have English names. These rich, like their counterparts elsewhere in India send their children to English medium convent schools (day schools run mainly by Catholic missions) or English medium public schools. These large houses have diminutive names, e.g. so and so's cottage or 'Kutir' (a mendicant's hut).

3) Karol Bagh - Patel Nagar - Karol Bagh was Qarol Bag in Moghul times and was a small suburb. It deteriorated later on

and until about 1916, Qarol Bagh, "was covered with Jungles, and was dotted by a few hamlets here and there..... The inhabitants..... were engaged in pig-rearing, leather tanning, shoe-making etc." (Delhi: Bopegamage 1957, P. 104) When Delhi was declared the Capital of India in 1911, the spatial expansion and development started. Karol Bagh, situated as it was between the relatively established suburb of Sabzi Mandi and the developing New Delhi, saw quick changes. By 1931, half of Karol Bagh had modern houses, and by 1950, the whole area was developed. The three Patel Nagars are the adjacent areas and came into being after 1947. The 2 - 3 storey houses are well designed. Karol Bagh shopping area is now as colourful as Chandni Chowk and is cleaner.

As to the original inhabitants of this area, they are now concentrated in Regharpura which is an enclave in the northern part of Karol Bagh. Most of the Regharpurias belong to lower castes such as Chamars, Chuhra, Lohar and Nai; Chamars are the single largest caste. Regharpura is hemmed in by rich, high caste Karol Bath.

4) Shahdara - This comprises old congested Shahdara town and the new planned housing colonies East of Yamuna river. The other zones, the Cantonment area and New Delhi are new and/or well-planned. These housing colonies have sprung up all over metropolitan Delhi, including new Delhi. These are in all shapes and sizes, built by private builders and by Delhi Development Authority or DDA¹³. These colonies are treeless and look always unfinished.

New Delhi, planned by Lutyens and Baker, was isolated from the Delhi of the ordinary people. That isolation persists. Within New Delhi, structural changes have taken place. The high rise buildings have emerged particularly on Parliament street and have brought investment and livelihood in the middle of what was governmental bureaucracy. The colonnaded Connaught Circus has a sprinkling of corner stalls to give it a touch of oriental colour, which can be seen in greater measure on Janpath shops and the evening stalls of handloom and handicrafts in Connaught Place. Notwithstanding this market place touch, Connaught Place remains what it was intended to be a show piece of modern production and marketing. It is here, as nowhere else in Delhi, that foreign visitors can be seen. Even the hippies from the West in search of wisdom of the orient feel comfortable in New Delhi.

Delhi's first discotheque - Cellars is in Connaught Place. Westernised Indians mark Christmas and New Year eve in the Connaught Place hotels and restaurants.

But the problem of Greater Delhi is that of securing a viable and organic relationship between the nine cities that make up Greater Delhi. This relationship cannot be attained for all: decent housing, assured and safe water supply, comfortable public transport, recreational spaces and playgrounds, good schools, medical relief and good sewerage. This latter presupposes good working conditions for Bhangis.

No account of Delhi will be complete without a short

description of the shack-dwellers (Jhuggiwalas) and the pavement sleepers. These are migrants from villages and even other towns in search of employment. Not all of them are unskilled manual labourers or recently arrived Bhangis as distinct from the long settled Bhangis (the subject of my study). Among the shack-dwellers are those who have a skill e.g. carpentry or have acquired one e.g. motor mechanic, house painting. Most of the labourers at building sites live in shacks. Beautiful buildings rise up with their labour, but they and their children live in hovels.

Delhi, whether it be Indraprastha of Pandavas, Delhi of Raja Dilu or Dhilu of Maurayan dynasty, Delhi of the last Hindu king, Prithvi Raj Chauhan, Delhi (Shahjahanabad) of the Moghuls; Delhi of East India company, New Delhi of the British viceroys, Metropolitan Delhi of democratic India's demagogic politicians depends for healthy existence on sanitary services. Sanitation in India has been the 'birth right' of the sweeper caste, the Bhangis.

NOTES

1. 120 miles South of Delhi is the city of Agra, on the banks of river Yamuna. Here the eastern bank is higher than the western bank. The famous Taj Mahal is built on the eastern bank.
2. Paschim Pura is literally West Town. It is middle income area. The neo-rich would have selected English sounding name Friends Colony, South Extension etc). New townships in Greater Delhi have names with political connotations, that is, (Patel, Jawahar, Kamla Nagars etc); historical (Lodhi Colony); religious (Guru Teg Bahadur Nagar); Sectarian (Nirankari Colony); regional (Panjabi Bagh, Gujranwala Town). Paschim Puri is perhaps the only exception and, may, some day be re-named after a local political boss.
3. A cleanliness campaign worked heavy handedly during the Emergency rule in 1957-77. This campaign was directed particularly against those living below the poverty line in the marginal areas of the city. Their hutments were bulldozed, inhabitants were herded in lorries and dumped beyond the outskirts of Greater Delhi, thus lending weight to Dr. Ambedkar's thesis that the Shudras and outcastes living on the fringes of villages were members of vanquished groups.
4. The only other clocktower anywhere in Delhi is the Sabzi Mandi clock tower. It is near the Birla Mill on Roshan Ara Road, west of Sabzi Mandi. Following the collapse of Chandni Chowk tower, Sabzi Mandi clock tower was completely scaffolded in bamboos for many years and brought lucrative profit to the private contractor who, it is said, rented the bamboos to the Delhi Corporation.

5. Bastardisation of places names has taken place in India, despite Jawaharlal Nehru's desire that historical names should stay. Marg is the Hindi equivalent for Road. This sort of road in most Indian towns and cities is invariably Railway Road. In Delhi, it was Queen's Road and the adjacent park, Queen's Park in deference to Queen Victoria. The park was from Moghul times and was Jahan Ara Bagh or Begam Bagh, dedicated to Shahjahan's daughter Jahan Ara Begam. Begam is Persian for Queen. This park is now called Mahatma Gandhi Park. Mahatma Gandhi has a park to himself known as Rajghat, where he was cremated on the banks of Yamuna. Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukerjee was the leader of Jana Sangh Party. When this party captured Delhi Municipal Corporation, it produced its quota of re-naming roads and squares. What happens when a new 'gang of four' takes over next?

6. W.S. Caine lived in Clapham Common in London. In the Preface to his book, he writes, that he spent four winters in India. The British administrators of India had little respect for the members of Parliament who would descend upon the sub-continent in winter and returning home before the onset of the hot season, criticise the administration in India. Rudyard Kipling's poem "Pagett, M.P." in his "Departmental Ditties" is interesting reading.

7. Top quality handloom and handicrafts shops are now in New Delhi, in and around Connaught Place, especially in the various state emporia on Baba Kharag Singh Marg, Cottage Industries Emporium, Khadi Bhandar and a few private shops. Also, in shops located in the central govt owned hotels, built with public money but inaccessible to the vast mass of the people of India.

8. "It belonged to Sir Thomas Metcalfe, British representative at the (Moghul) king's court. It was planned as a house suitable both to its owner's important position in India and as a repository for his fine furniture and marble statues, his oil paintings and engravings, his 25,000 books and extensive collection of Napoleon Bonaparte"..... (P. 23. The Great Mutiny: Christopher Hibbert, Viking Press, New York. 1978).

The ground floor rooms were shaded by a columned verandah. Sir Thomas Metcalfe died in 1853. His nephew, Sir John Metcalfe (1828-83) was Joint Magistrate at Delhi in 1857. He was a stern and masterful avenger after the Mutiny and his victims were hanged from the charred beams of his house. (Hibbert: P. 317) Metcalfe House and Ludlow Castle were briefly captured by the rebels in 1857. Metcalfe House was restored in 1913.

9. The Indians have re-named the Mutiny Memorial as Jit Garh (meaning victory Fortress). The British inscription on the Mutiny Memorial reads..... "In memory of the officers and soldiers, British and Native, of the Delhi field force who were killed in action or died of wounds or disease between 30th May and 20th September 1857. This monument has been erected by the comrades who lament their loss and by the Government they served so well..... fighting the enemy."

The Indians have put this inscription below the British inscription....The 'Enemy' of the inscription on this monument were those who rose against colonial rule and fought bravely for national liberation in 1857. In memory of the Heroism of those immortal Martyrs for Indian freedom, this plaque was unveiled on the 25th anniversary of the nation's attainment of freedom.

28th August 1972

10. The Ridge was the high ground where the British garrison along with women and children had taken shelter in four buildings, namely, Hindu Rao's House, The Observatory, a ruined mosque, and in Flagstaff tower. Major General Richard Hilton in his Centenary History of the Mutiny "The Indian Mutiny", London, 1957, laments that the Ridge itself had other

disadvantages from a tactical point of view. Chief of these was the rocky nature of the soil which made digging almost impossible" (P. 106).

But further on, on page 108, he admits, "Though the Ridge itself was a naturally strong tactical feature it was soon found to be prone to surprise frontal attacks, owing to the wooded nature of the country between the line of hills and the city walls. The intervening strip was so thickly timbered that it looked like a forest to observers on the Ridge. In reality it was a well watered plain containing gardens, trees, large houses, and residential suburbs. The whole area offered many lines of concealed approach for parties of enemy emerging from the city." The villages of Sabzi Mandi and Kishan Ganj in the valley below the Ridge, were scenes of much fierce fighting.

11. Class IV houses are the single-floor type. There is class IV a - a large house with dozens of one-room tenements, occupied by one family both for cooking and sleeping. Mostly, poor labourers live in these houses, which stand in Bara Hindu Rao, Shadipura and Beadonpura area in Karol Bagh. What a world of difference between class IV and IVa, almost as between a Brahmin and a Bhangi! Houses in Old Delhi are unplanned and are of five types, differentiated by the number of floors/storeys: three or more storeys (class I); two storeys (class II); one storey (class III); the ground floor type (class IV) and the shacks (locally known as jhuggi) Sub-classification is determined by the size of the house (big or small) and the age (25 years or less, are new; 30-50 years, are old; over 50 years, are very old).

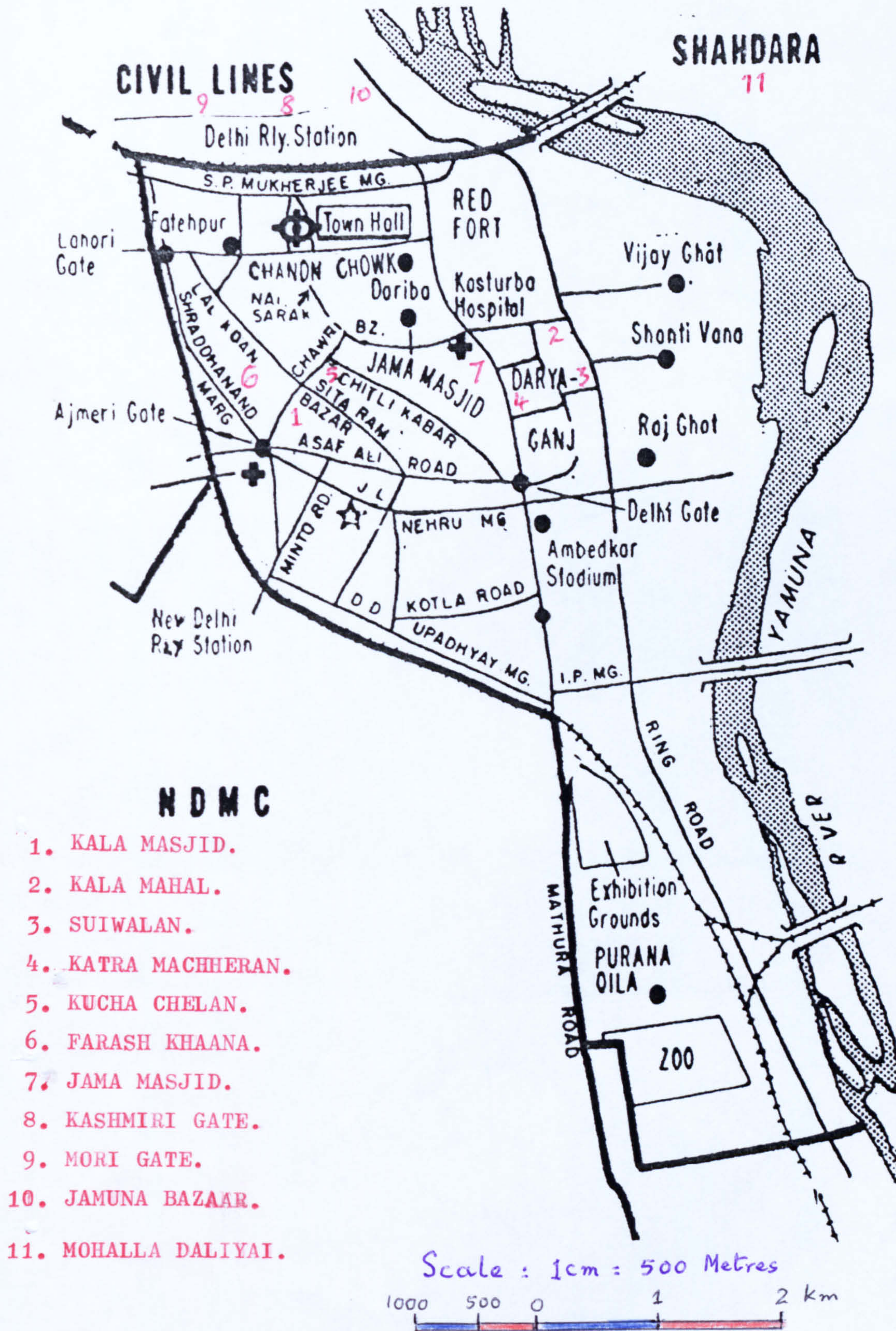
12. May be, in a thousand year's time, the Indians will dig up the archaeological remains of the Raj and preserve them just as the Britons are now preserving the Roman archaeological finds.

13. Delhi Development Authority (D.D.A.) started functioning on the last day of 1957. It and the two Municipal authorities have done a lot to curb land speculation, squatting, unauthorised construction and, it is said, the slums. D.D.A. flats are of two

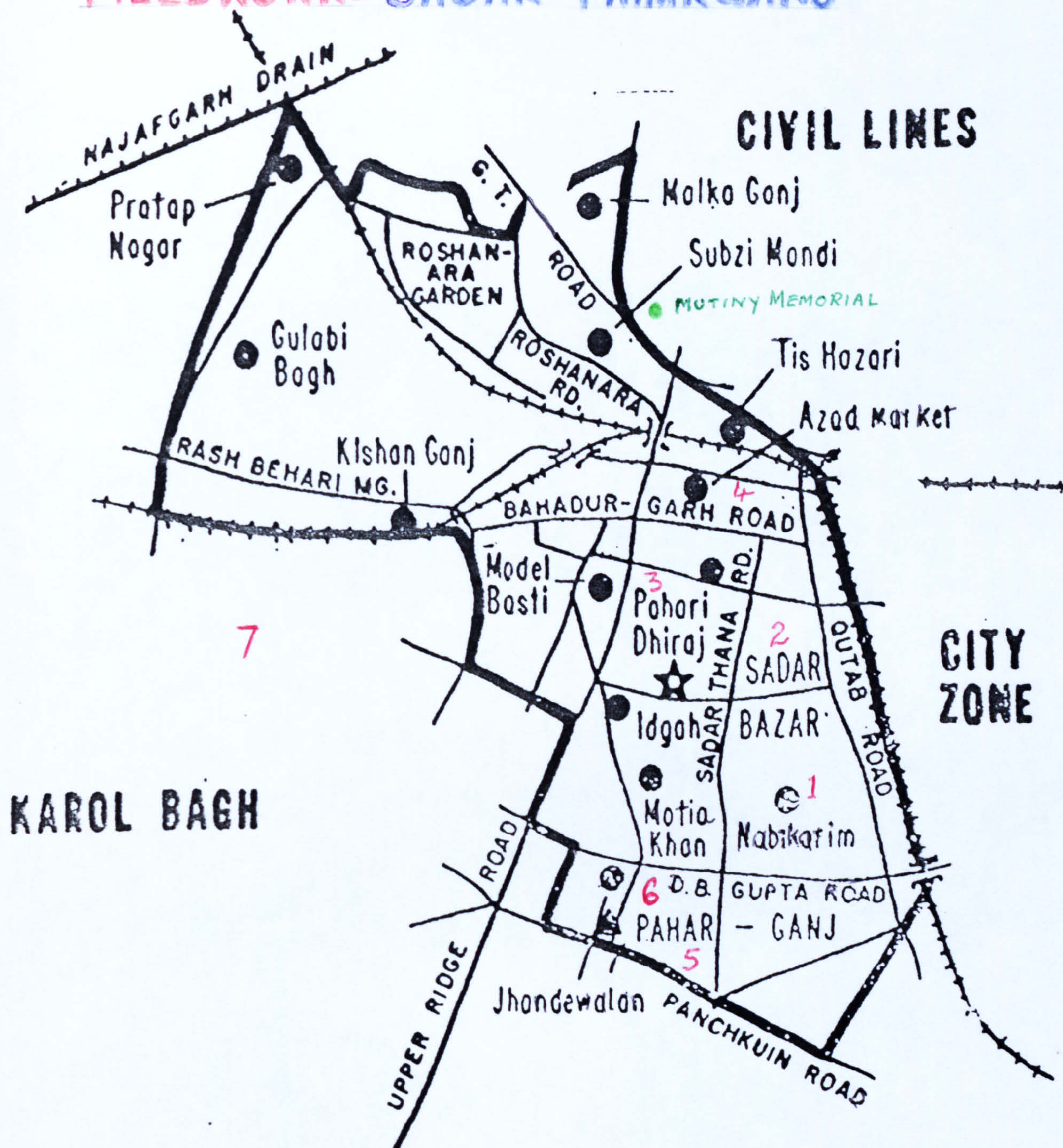
types: the middle income group flats have three rooms, kitchen, bath and separate toilet. Janata flats or flats for the common people have one room, kitchen, bath and separate toilet. Janata flats are improved tenements, the improvement lies in cross-ventilation and individual flush toilets and baths. The old tenements of the Municipal Corporation still have common toilets, about ten, for upto fifty families, and common bath rooms, women's separate from those of men's.

During recent years, houses and flats built by DDA have shown grave structural defect, poor material and shoddy work. Newspapers reported that buyers of these homes had been cheated of hundreds of millions of rupees.

FIELDWORK - CITY ZONE



FIELDWORK - SADAR PAHARGANJ



1. NABIN KARIM.
2. DEPUTY GANJ.
3. PAHARI DHIRAJ.
4. TELIWARA.
5. PAHAR GANJ.
6. CHUNA MANDI.
7. 100 QUARTER BHANGI COLONY.

Scale : 1cm = 500 Metres



CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study of Bhangis, I have applied anthropological techniques and methods to an urban scene. The field work for the present study was conducted between the years 1982 - 83. As in the villages so in the cities, lower caste groups like Bhangis live segregated in mohallas.

Several factors influenced me to undertake the study of the Bhangi community and its marginal position in Hindu society. My childhood memories are replete with the stir before the arrival of the Bhangin: the clearing of the area of her walk in the courtyard, lest she should touch or even pass by any article, and the remark to her that she was sometimes lax in the quality of her work. Any resentment from the Bhangin was interpreted in terms of Kaliyug or the fourth and the lowest epoch of mankind, when classes and castes will deviate widely from their allotted place in life. A generous gift of old clothes or stale food was acknowledged by the Bhangin with polite blessings to the giver. Nearly all upper caste households and their Bhangins were caught up in this degrading routine, that is, degrading to the Bhangis and the non-Bhangis alike.

Sociologically, I wanted to study the marginality of the Bhangi community, the mechanism of prejudice towards them, their changing reaction to the age-old social oppression and the efforts towards a better social acceptance.

3.1 URBAN SCENE

Variety of research methods were used in this study but the basic approach was that of the intensive community study. Bhangis are not an anthropological isolate but a small community (isolated caste) which is an excluded part of a larger society. They live segregated in Katras/Bastis distinct from the urban mainstream.

Shehri Bhangis' Katras/Bastis are mostly confined within the boundary of walled city of Delhi and parts of Old Delhi. Most of the other Bhangis of Greater Delhi (comprising New Delhi and the suburbs) are recent migrants from the neighbouring states.

I chose the walled city area and parts of Old Delhi for my investigations. It was not difficult to delimit the boundaries of the caste group because the population for sampling was based on natural, observable segregated aggregates in the research area. Preliminary fieldwork was done in order to select the best possible ways of defining my Universe.

3.2 THE UNIVERSE

The population of Bhangis in the Union Territory of Delhi is large (134,987, according to the 1971 Census). As stated above, 'Shehri' Bhangis are living within the boundaries of the walled city and parts of Old Delhi. Administratively also their area of habitation comes under the Delhi Municipal Corporation. The population of Bhangis in Delhi Municipal Corporation is 85,188. There was no possibility of under-

taking one hundred percent sampling. I was aware of the twin problem of defining my area of observation and of devising ways for ensuring that the observations represented that area.

Every alternate Mohalla within the DMC area was selected for the investigations. The Mohalla as a residential unit plays an important function in kinship and marriage. There is a definite identification of persons with their Mohallas. Outside the Mohallas, people are identified as so and so of X - Mohalla.

3.3 SAMPLING

The sample comprised 300 families which were randomly selected from all the alternate Mohallas. Prior to the detailed investigations a census of households in a particular Mohalla was taken from which every 3rd, 5th, 10th or 20th house was investigated, depending upon the size of the Mohalla or the ratio to the total population desired in the sample. However during the course of my fieldwork I, sometimes, encountered situations in which strict procedures for ensuring randomness could not be achieved; for instance, informants were not available or they were not willing to be interviewed. The haphazard sampling was the best for these particular situations. As regards the presentation of typical cases I used unstated intuitive criteria as a guide to this sampling in matters of selection of informants.

Special interviews were conducted with persons of this caste in political, literary, social and educational spheres regarding assessment of Gandhi's and Ambedkar's role in the uplift of

the caste, political participation in the post independant era, prevalence of untouchability and a general assessment of the socio-cultural life and problems of the caste.

Potentially significant questions were identified by means of participant observation and key - informant interviewing. I carried out informal interviewing and other preliminary work for several weeks in order to identify significant questions for structured interviewing.

To assess the degree and extent of the continuance of correlation between occupation and caste, the sample was divided in terms of age categories to ensure adequate representation of all generations. For the purpose of this study, these age categories are crucial, since they would help in giving a picture of the changing situation.

	Age Categories	Sample data	Percentage to the sample
A	50 years and above	125	41.66%
B	35 - 49 years	100	33.33%
C	18 - 34	75	25%
	Total	300	

In these categories, A represents old age, B middle age and C the youth.

3.4 THE OBSERVER

My initial acquaintance with the Bhangis of Delhi was through the members of one of their caste associations. Quite a lot

of time was spent in order to get acquainted with the people. During the course of my preliminary investigations I established friendly relations with a few informants. I would have long spells of apparently idle conversation with them. Problems of initial adjustment with the situation were sometimes confided in them so as to rely upon them for help in the field.

Communities, families and individuals are reluctant to give information bearing on personal matters to people not known to them. To the Bhangis I was an unknown person. Not only was I an outsider but also one belonging to the 'higher' exploiting caste. In so far as my own predilections were, I had no hesitation in partaking of the Bhangis' food. This sharing of their food and cups of tea went a little beyond the mere ceremonial for establishing rapport.

Never in the past, had anyone or a government agency sought information from Bhangis concerning their progress - and stagnation - in the Hindu society, at least not on the personal, face to face level, as I was doing. I did not hide from them that my role of information gatherer was mainly for my research. Nevertheless the Bhangis had a feeling that my non-partisan objective study would project to the non-Bhangi world the degradation, the struggles and hopes of the Bhangi community. The Bhangis gave me their help, consideration and even affection. On my part I held them in respect and friendship.

My role was that of the researcher and I had to be extremely careful about presentation of self and the 'management' of social-interaction between the Bhangis and myself and also among the Bhangis. As fieldworker I was aware of the importance of what Berreman and others have referred to as impression management (Berreman 1962; 6).

As said above, the initial acquaintance with my informants was through the members of one of the caste associations of Bhangis. In the early phases of my fieldwork, I encountered social rebuffs from the leaders of other Bhangi caste associations.

Consequent to this non-co-operation, I experienced helplessness and anxiety regarding data collection. However, this social competition among Bhangis loyal to different associations and, what they later said was, unintended non-co-operation, disappeared gradually as I found opportunities to convey to them the dimensions of my special participant observer role and also that I was concerned with the problems of Bhangis irrespective of their intra-community problems.

With the emergence of willing co-operation developed friendly atmosphere so much so that they looked forward to my seeing them and meeting them everyday. And whenever I returned to resume fieldwork after a short absence, a warm welcome awaited me.

3.5 RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The techniques employed for the present field work were those associated with what is called the 'holistic depiction' - a methodological entity. The intensive techniques were observation - participant and otherwise, general 'open-ended' interviews, informal conversation, meeting people, participation in events, keeping diaries etc.

Anthropologists are expected to live as members of the society that they study. For a woman to live among the Bhangis would not have been socially acceptable, as many Bhangis spend their evenings in drinking. My participation in the traditional work of the Bhangis could not be possible. I could never be mistaken for a Bhangin unless 'made-up' by a film making team. Secondly, my act of cleaning streets and latrines was unlikely to be understood by the community in Gandhian tradition. Lastly, I was not bold enough to actually try my hand at latrine cleaning; and even if I had ventured to do so, the Bhangis would have stopped me from soiling my hands. However, within the limitations set out above, I sought and got acceptance in the community as a participant observer. Bhangis were very kind in allowing me to observe their work, leisure activities, domestic life, religious ceremonies other cultural and social affairs. They readily gave me information about the community, both verbal tradition and such printed and written material as they had.

The Bhangis had no illusion about my role as researcher. They knew that the outcome of my research will not bring about any

immediate change in their low status in society. However they could see that the study was not sponsored by a government department or a political party and that its objectivity will serve the interest of the Bhangi community in the long run.

Centuries of social oppression has not marred the friendliness of the Bhangis towards me. We used kin terms for each other, as is the custom among all classes and castes of India. I was sister to men and 'Bhua' (father's sister) to their children. As brothers they became very protective and would escort me to the bus stop or the scooter-taxi, sometimes even to my home if my fieldwork continued late in the evening. A number of times, I too, invited them for lunch at my home. My relations and friends would often laugh about my research. "How do you take tea or eat at their (Bhangis') place..... they are so dirty"? was the usual surprised comments.

This made me realize the extent to which barriers exist between Bhangis and the rest of the society and to recognise some of the forces that interfere with the breaking down of these barriers.

Intensive techniques had their considerable value, but they were not enough. Another instrument was needed to provide a standard stimulus to a sampled group of informants. In order to obtain responses to important questions, I used a carefully devised interview schedule. This was introduced at important points for illustrating and supporting conclusions derived from observation and other intensively gathered research data.

Since I was working in an urban population, the careful relationship between extensive and intensive methods was very necessary. I felt that interview was somewhat an artificial and formal technique, more so when I was working in a group having a strong traditionalist collectivist pattern. Hindu society, despite the impact of individualistic Western values, continues to be strongly family and group oriented. Bhangis are on the outer fringe of Hindu society but they exhibit all the patterns of family and group loyalties of the upper caste Hindus. Since, they are the socially oppressed, Bhangis have the group unity and cohesiveness of the downtrodden.

Reasons that encouraged me for the numerical analysis of data.

1. Large Population:- Because of the large population in the research area I had to adopt a structured interview schedule to supplement the face to face methods for the study of small communities.
2. For analysis of degree and extent of the continuance of correlation between occupation and caste.
3. Specific pieces of field information needed supporting data, so that reliability and validity of the information could be evaluated.

Information derived through participant observation was basic to all the other techniques employed during the fieldwork. Preliminary data from participant observation gave me the clues and insights for developing interview schedule. Furthermore,

participant observation provided checking and monitoring of field observation which in turn helped in evaluating data gathered from interviews.

Objectivity and representativeness were attained by observing a particular event in repetition. I kept myself equidistant from the different groups owing loyalty to various associations.

3.6 KEY INFORMANTS

Key informant interviewing was an important source of information about Bhangis' culture about the changing ways of life and those life styles which have practically disappeared. The key informants were persons occupying special position in the Bhangi society because of their age, experience, education or qualities of leadership. The information that they helped me in gathering had many common elements. These were sifted and a coherent re-construction was obtained.

I was aware of the problem of reliability of what the informants may communicate. Therefore, I made a careful selection of informants who represented important variations within the Bhangi community, like not only the traditional caste panchayat leaders and religious innovators, but also shamans, musicians and even wrestlers. Information provided by them was reliable. Sometimes, more individuals were added to the panel of informants to see if that would have any significant effect on the general structure of the data pattern. When the effect was minimal, the sample was considered satisfactory.

Some form of sampling procedure was necessary, nevertheless such were the realities of fieldwork that deviations were made from random selection procedure, particularly in the case of key informant interviews. This was a compromise but one necessitated in the interest of best possible results.

I collected extensive biographical material from persons who presented personal, social and cultural data with sensitivity and in detail. These were mostly middle aged individuals of moderate ability. I was not interested in the Bhangis' life histories as mere life histories. Rather, these autobiographical narratives provided the patterning of their beliefs and cultural interests and their perception and understanding of the place of their community within the Hindu society. These life histories provided explanatory and illustrative material for other types of data that have been collected more representatively, (Cora Dubois 1960; underlines the problem of the use of life histories as data about cultures. She emphasises that her eight informants were not a representative sample of the local community, but that these eight life histories provided the basis for generalisations which she supplemented with other techniques.)

3.7 FIELD EVENTS

The opening move of the field work was made when I was a participant observer at a major public event of the Bhangi community, viz, celebration of Maharishi Balmiki's birthday. Balmiki Jayanti has both a religious and a festive aspect. Large number of people assemble and a big procession is taken

out through the city of Delhi. This is followed by a public meeting. During my first participation in this most significant public event for the Bhangis, the following key questions arose in my mind for the understanding of the overall process:-

1. Who are the different kinds of people involved in this celebration?
2. How are these people grouped in alliances, opposition, etc?
3. Who are the leaders or the persons having decision making privileges?

Afterwards I realised that the questions raised by my first participation/observation in the said event pointed in two directions. First, it was important to see the gaps in the data about Balmiki birthday celebrations. These gaps would need to be filled in observing subsequent celebrations. All this was of considerable help in the analysis of Balmiki movement. Secondly, data regarding this movement which I had gathered from other sources, corresponded with the inferences drawn from my first participant observations.

Throughout my fieldwork, I paid particular attention to the study and analysis of significant private and public events that took place in the research community. These events were religious ceremonies, both pertaining to religion as such and those accompanying marriages, annual fairs and festivals. Convening of panchayats and general meetings of caste associations were also focus of attention. The repeated observation of these social events provided an important part of my

data concerning social processes in the Bhangi community.

With the passage of time, as my presence in the Bhangi community became accepted and I became a limited part of the local scene, the Bhangis would ask me to be present in the caste associations' meetings. They even asked me to ^Uinagurate these meetings.

As said above, I had several opportunities to observe public and private events. The one on a large scale was a public meeting, "All India Safai Mazdoor Congress" held in the vicinity of Ramlila ground of Delhi. It might be called a rare event. Fieldwork was organised with reference to a tentative framework which I had formed after preliminary questioning. I drew an outline of the main items of data to be obtained on any particular occasion. This outline had to be varied according to the occasion under observation because each event in the field requires its own specified notes and queries.

I also made a judicious and economical use of the documentary evidence of local and national history and of the political and other data of social and national movements bearing on the problems of Bhangis.

CHAPTER 4

THE BHANGI NEIGHBOURHOOD

4.1. KATRAS AND BASTIS

Old city of Delhi is badly congested. It will not be an exaggeration if we call the whole area a sprawling slum. The congestion and insanitation differs from place to place. Most of the buildings are unfit for human habitation. Structures are old, dilapidated, beyond meaningful repairs. Bhangis, like other poor people in Delhi, are living in slums, squatter settlements and now the recently established resettlement colonies (one room per family) throughout the city and across the river Yamuna.

The United Nations has defined a 'slum' as "a building, a group of buildings or area characterised by overcrowding deterioration in sanitary conditions or absence of facilities or amenities which because of these conditions or any one of them endanger the health, safety or morals of its inhabitants or the community." (Bharat Sevak Samaj 1958;9) Squatter settlements locally known as Jhuggis (huts) are made with mud, old bricks, straw, bamboos, wood and similar materials. These squatter settlements or Jhuggi - Jhonpri clusters are found located amidst the surrounding residential areas. In resettlement colonies, people are shifted from squatter settlements and established there.

Shehri Bhangis are living in the most crowded parts of Delhi in Katras and Bastis. Bharat Sewak Samaj in their survey report of slums of old Delhi define Katra as, "a group of usually single room tenements constructed normally in rows to capacity,



Bhangi Katras.



Sweeper hutments on the roof of Katras.

within a compound, characteristically with only one entrance. On the other hand Bastis, symptomatic of haphazard urban growth, consist mainly of a thick cluster of small Kucha houses and huts built usually in an unauthorised manner." (Bharat Sewak Samaj 1958; 17) Katras were constructed mainly by civil authorities and were a part of the early planned growth of the city.

Shahri Bhangis within the walled city of Delhi are living in Katras like Katra Machheran, Kucha Pati Ram, Kucha Chelan, Suiwalan, Farash Khana, Rang Mahal. Most of the Katra tenements cover only the ground floor, consist of one room with one door, opening in the front onto a sort of verandah which serves as a cooking place. Some of the Katras have first floor or upper storey with rooms of the same size as on the ground floor, with a balcony. In these upper storey rooms live more families. These tenements are built of bricks and cement and have a window. Tenements on Panch Kuyian Road in New Delhi and on Asaf Ali Road do not have windows. The rooms are dark; even in high summer electric light is switched on.

Outside the walled city Shahri Bhangis are living in Bastis like Navin Karim, Pahari DheeraJ, Teliwara, Paharganj, Sadar Bazar, Chuna Mandi etc. These areas developed as suburbs soon after the city was founded. Bhangis then lived outside the walled city as they always had even in the villages. In the beginning the whole area had rural character. In the middle of the 19th century, the process of urban growth accelerated with the result that these areas are today as thickly populated

as the walled city. Basti Kalan Masjid is situated within the walled city. All these Bastis have brick structures, mostly single room tenements with a small courtyard.

As the family expands or other needs arise, additional structures are constructed in the form of "Khokha" on the top of tenements. A "Khokha" is a box-like structure made up of scrap wood, tin sheets, gunny bags and similar material. A true "Khokha" should be large enough for a 'Charpoy' (stringed bedstead) and a little extra, but small enough to be invisible to the custodians of municipal by-laws. Khokha is the poor man's Nissan hut. In sociological terms, the Khokha is an extension of the Basti within the Basti limits.

These Katras and Bastis are overflowing with people. Ancient narrow lanes separate the uneven rows of delapidated houses. Municipal water taps always in continuous use by short or long lines of people with buckets and vessels supply the water for the community. Behind makeshift covered enclosures in the verandahs, people wash themselves. Municipal latrines now have the flush system, but the cisterns are usually leaky, out of order or the toilet bowls are blocked up. Children squat to ease themselves on the open drains. Drainage system is inadequate and servicing of drains is badly neglected. Invariably, there are concrete garbage enclosures in these Bastis. Similar garbage enclosures in other parts of the city are a health nuisance. They are either constantly full, or never completely emptied. Overflowing with refuse, they attract pigs and dogs. It is not unusual to see them receiving their load



Living conditions of Bhangis.

until filled to their capacity. Foul matter adheres to their walls which smells awfully. The deposit of garbage on the roadsides and streets is not an uncommon sight. In the rainy season, considerable amount gets washed out and spreads into the streets and blocks the gutters. One such garbage dump is in Kucha Chellan, a Bhangi family lives in the one room tenement on the top of this overflowing dump. An outsider feels dizzy after two mouthfuls of stench hanging in the atmosphere affecting the neighbourhood inhabited by Muslims. Just across the road is Chandni Mahal police station. Asaf Ali Road busy with traffic going to and from New Delhi is about 120 yards from this and another nearby dump. Golcha Cinema and the nearby Moti Mahal restaurants are less than 600 yards from these garbage dumps. Hoechest, the German pharmaceutical and chemical Company has its office within the odour distance of these garbage dumps, the Company's neon hoarding proudly flashing its 'long years in the service of health'.

Bhangi colonies built by Corporation also present a sorry state of affairs. Corporation colonies are built as double-storeyed single room tenements for sweepers of DMC. These colonies consist of parallel semi-paved alleys with houses on either side, or they are squares enclosed by rows of single room tenements on all sides. These tenements are miniature black holes with no windows for air and light. Some of these tenements measuring only 10 X 12 Ft are occupied by as many as 8 to 10 members of the family. On one side of these colonies are double rows of latrines and water taps.



Sweeper Bastis.

The filth and squalor is the same as in Katras and Bastis. Corporation colonies usually house a far greater number of people than originally intended. These colonies mostly were built in 1940's, when Bhangis were migrating from the neighbouring provinces. The process of migration never stops. They often accommodate rural kins who come to the city in search of jobs. Under these living conditions, generations of Delhi Bhangis have born, grown and lived their lives. (Individual Karma, or social injustice and oppression?)

Bhangis living in the most crowded parts of Delhi are physically segregated and socially completely isolated from fellow Indians. Each Basti or Katra is a residential unit popularly called Mohalla. Outside of these residential units people are defined such and such of X Mohalla. It acts as a unit of social organisation. Kinship terms are applied to the members of the Mohalla. People are related to each other by real or fictive kinship. It functions as an exogamous unit. Marriages within the immediate and adjacent Mohallas are not a desirable alternative.

4.2. FAMILY STRUCTURE

The size of the family when compared to the limited living space available in a slum tenement leads to a gross congestion of people within the tenement with little privacy for family life. The family includes a man, his wife and their unmarried children, sometimes married children too live with their parents. The father is the head of the family. All authority is vested in him and descent is also traced through him. Husband and wife in the beginning (for the first few years of married

life) stay with the parents of the husband, then they establish a new household, a separate 'Chulha' or hearth. Joint families among Bhangis do not appear to be of the stable and persisting type. It is not uncommon to see the courtyards of the tenement partitioned off into much smaller structures. Additional structures and 'Khokhas' are put together with every kind of junk material, wooden boxes, pieces of corrugated iron, old doors and windows. After the death of the father, married brothers and their families will inevitably split, especially if the mother has also died. By and large the reasons given for the break-up of joint families are: quarrels between wives, quarrels over the use of money, preference to live separately. The dispute over the allocation of monetary resources, arguments that lead to a split will arise. After the death of the father all brothers have a right to an equal share of the house and its belongings. However, the majority of the Bhangis do not have ownership of the houses in which they are living. All brothers have equal share in 'Thikanas' (Private scavenging). In case, where mother is alive and she does not want to divide her Mohallas or Thikanas in her own lifetime the sons' wives may continue to work with her in 'Thikanas' and are given their share of work as well as income. A daughter does not get anything, except gifts on her marriage. After the death of the father, it is the responsibility of brothers to arrange her marriage.

Relationship between husband and wife in Bhangi families are not very different from the usual family norms observed in other communities. The wife is expected to show respect to her husband. A man can strike his wife but she cannot strike

back. A husband can scold his wife but she ought not to talk back, but she does argue and can be assertive. By and large married life is fairly stable. Estrangement between partners does happen, but does not seem to lead to separation and divorce.

Newly married women are expected to cover their faces by lowering the veil of a dupatta or sari, before the elder male members of her husband's Mohalla. However, with the passage of time and when she has born children, she is allowed greater freedom in speaking to other men of her husband's Mohalla. Bhangi community is endogamous, the endogamy reinforces the internal unity of the caste and separateness from all the other subcastes. Marriages are the most important events in the community and they are ritually elaborated. All marriages are arranged by parents or by other male members of the community. Bride and groom have little or no say in the arrangement. The custom is changing in the case of the educated who want to have their say and preference. This is only one or two steps behind the upper caste norms. The girl's marriage is a financial burden because of the dowry¹ (in the form of gifts). In the recent past, a bride's family was expected to entertain the groom's family for marriage rituals lasting 2-3 days. Now-a-days there is a definite change in the custom. A 'barat' stays only for one night. Among Shahri Bhangis, pre-pubertial marriages are not common. Girls and boys are married only when they have reached puberty. Among educated Bhangis, there has been a definite change in attitude about marriage and marriage partners. For many of the younger generation educated Bhangi men, marriage has been a problem. They were married to

illiterate wives and that presents a predicament. In better professions when they meet different kinds of people, they feel inferiority complex in introducing their illiterate or semi-literate wives to others. In recent years, as girls also have started going to school and beyond, the educated wives will be more numerous.

In the evening, hearth fires make the air thick with smoke which does not easily disperse because of the congested Mohallas. Tired after the day's hard work women cook in the courtyards. The rooms inside the houses are generally kept very clean. Girls help their mothers. Menfolk sit on the charpoys, smoke hookah, 'biri' or cigarette and discuss various things from politics, corporation to corruption. It is not uncommon to see naked or half-naked children running about and people in various postures of poverty. Young boys play with marbles. Well-dressed young Bhangi men have their own groups and get-togethers. Radios keep blaring from most homes, now-a-days monochrome T.V.'s are also there in most Bhangi households. Drinking is common among men. In fact the use of alcoholic drinks is an integral part of the culture of Bhangis. Women also drink but only on ritual occasions. Meat eating, drinking and smoking is on the decline among the educated Bhangis. Many are vegetarians and teetotalers.

The indebtedness is also a problem in the Bhangi community. About 65% of the informants said that they were under debt. This indebtedness ranged from a few hundred rupees to Rs 3,000. It is a common saying among Bhangis that they are born in debt,

live in debt and die in debt. The reasons for this state of affairs is partly of their own making. Rituals associated with life cycle ceremonies involving the extended family cause indebtedness. The money is borrowed from Mahajans (moneylenders). This indebtedness then leads to gambling (for a quickbuck) and other social evils. There is a case for the corporation or a government department to pay off the money lenders and realise the borrowed amounts from the Bhangis concerned at a nominal rate of interest. This should be a once-for-all affair. Social evils that lead to borrowings need to be given up. Education, caste council discussions and resolutions can help the community's emancipation both from social evils and the consequent indebtedness.

4.3. CASTE ORGANISATION

The community's traditional organisation or caste council is the Panchayat. According to legend, the first Chaudharies numbering nine were appointed by the Moghul Emperor ShahJehan, the grandson of the great Akbar who had nine Ratnas or Extraordinary Ministers and artists in his court. The Bhangis see, not coincidence, but correspondence with the Moghul Ratnas! The original nine Chaudharies grew to seventeen, of whom 12 represented the main residential units in the walled city and the 5, the suburbs. The tradition of 17 Chaudharies is still alive today. The eldest son inherits the office of the Chaudhari. The new incumbent entertains his senior Chaudharies with food and drink.

Within a Mohalla, all adult male Bhangis are Panch. Like the

traditional village Panchayat, these Panch can give opinion when called upon by the Chaudhari, but have no vote or decision making power. Commonplace disputes are settled by the Chaudhari of the Mohalla, but more serious matters require the presence and wisdom of neighbouring Chaudharies or even the full caste council.

Functions of the caste Panchyat until recent times:-

1. Arbitration and adjudication of disputes and their settlement within the community.
2. Making rules of behaviour for the community.
3. Social reforms in the caste.
4. Before the British administration of Delhi city, Bhangis used to report to the authorities any new settler in the area, because they had access to each and every household of the city.
5. Bhangis used to report to the authorities any illegal children born in the area.
6. Chaudharies used to collect money for poor parents who had daughters of marriageable age.
7. Adjudication of matters relating to illegal sexual relations.
8. Matters arising from purchase, sale of Jajmani rights.
 - a) Punishment for misdemeanour is usually fine, cash, or feast to the Chaudharies or even the Biradari. Punishment can be ex-communication for a fixed period. The old authority and influence of the Chaudharies has declined. Their presence, however, is essential at marriages, and other important events.

Increased literacy has weakened the Panchayat system and its

ability to enforce sanctions. Bhangis say that Chaudharies are corrupt and are only concerned about their own food and drinks and they secretly accept bribes. Civil courts as alternative system of justice are available to individuals. Educated young leaders have organised various caste associations. People turn to them as they have liaison with politicians who are better equipped to deal with present-day problems. Political contacts have been used to influence the police in favouring one party or another in internal conflicts. Chaudharies are now mere figureheads, politicians have replaced them by way of party politics. The alleged corruption of the Chaudharies has been replaced by the much more pervasive corruption of the politicians.

NOTES

1. There has been at least one case of bride burning for dowry reason.

CHAPTER 5

OCCUPATION - WORKING CONDITIONS

5.1. CASTE AND OCCUPATION

Most occupations in India, whether manual (skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled) or non-manual, are substantially based on caste traditions. This is particularly so regarding occupations which are hereditary and low manual, especially in the rural context; examples are, with corresponding caste names in parenthesis: Weaver (Joolaha), washerman (dhobi), barber (naai), potter (kamhaar), leather worker (chamar), sweeper/scavenger (chuhra/Bhangi). Industrialisation of the country and the resultant migration of sections of rural labour to the cities, has somewhat weakened the age - old hold of caste occupations and the stigma that is attached to some occupations. The village chamar may still be a leather-worker in the town, but he is a worker in a tannery where some of the fellow workers may be from the higher castes.

Where they have completely broken away from the traditional occupations, these village (or town) low caste workers have become part of the industrial/urban work force and to that extent, the caste as such does not affect them much in the normal workday life. Within the industrial unit, these low caste workers associate freely not only with other low caste fellow workers, but also with the few upper caste workers who happen to be in that unit.

However, the occupation of Bhangi (scavenger) has remained singularly hereditary. Scavenging is a dirty job, particularly

so in India, where it is carried out in extremely filthy working conditions. No other caste is willing to take up this occupation whatever the financial inducements.

In the late fifties, the government of Rajasthan announced a special allowance of 100% of a Bhangi's wages for any upper caste person who would take up scavenging. Despite a considerable number of the unemployed among the upper castes, none came forward.

The Bhangi caste is the lowest caste, an outcaste. The sweeper will consider himself as superior to scavenger (the one who carries night soil), even though both the sweeper and the scavenger belong to Bhangi caste. A self-employed Bhangi - the one who scavenges in private houses - will be considered inferior by his fellow Bhangi in the employment of municipal committee or corporation (local authority). This is so, primarily because the municipal employment is pensionable. There is a feeling of superiority - inferiority even among the scavenging Bhangis in the employment of municipality. Thus those who clean public latrines are held occupationally inferior by those who remove night soil from roads and open spaces. The cause for this superior/inferior feeling may lie in the quantitatively dirtier work of the latrine cleaning Bhangis.

Sanitation which is taken for granted in the West is a problem in India, a problem which is ever on the increase because of the growing urbanisation. From India Weekly, dated 27th March, 1980, published in London:- "A comprehensive plan for Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1980-90) is being prepared by the

Centre (Govt. of India) in consultation with the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and UNICEF.

According to a rough official estimate the plan is likely to be ready by the end of this year and will cost about Rs 158.3 billion (approximately a billion pounds).

The plan being prepared in accordance with the U.N. Water Conference at Mardel Plate, Argentina, held in 1977, envisages 100% coverage for water supply in the urban areas and 80% coverage for sanitation in towns and cities. In the rural area the plan will provide 25% coverage for sanitation and 100% for water. So far 80% of urban areas and 24% of villages are getting clean drinking water. Regarding sanitation, the areas covered so far are 33% in towns and cities and 25% in villages." (Summary of report from India Weekly)

The traditional Indian method for defecation is summed up in the descriptive compound word 'Jungle-paani' which transliterated is jungle-water. (Jungle is Hindustani for thick forest, but thanks to Rudyard Kipling it is known to every English reading child). Jungle-paani means going out at dawn in the jungle with a 'lota' (tumbler) of water. At daybreak, the non-urbanite Hindu walks away from human habitation, digs a hole in the ground (only ideally), squats over the hole and eases himself. He will not squat facing the sun. He should face windward so that the wind blows the noxious smell away from him. After easing himself he wipes his anus dry

with a clod of earth, moves a little away from the spot and then washes the anus with water carried in the tumbler. Only the left hand must be used, as the right hand is used for eating. Before leaving the spot, he will cover the hole with earth. Hardly anyone digs the hole or covers the excreta. Thereafter he would thoroughly scrub and wash his left hand with the water still left in the tumbler, to be followed by a thorough washing of his hands and the cleansing of the tumbler. Thereafter, he would have his (ritual) bathing. The scavenging Bhangi had no place in the ancient rural India. But the Bhangis were there, for general sanitation of the village, for removing dead cattle and for skinning them, and for collecting and disposing cowdung. The caste Hindus used and still use cowdung and cow urine for ritual purificatory purposes. Otherwise they do consider the end products of the cow's alimentary canal as filthy, and they avoid touching cowdung when not required so for ritual purposes.

In the cities, for obvious reasons, there were no jungles within easy reach for everybody. Latrines had to be used and, with latrines, the need for scavenger or Bhangis. Scavenging though an urban need has spread on a very limited scale to the villages where most well-to-do have their private latrines particularly for the women¹.

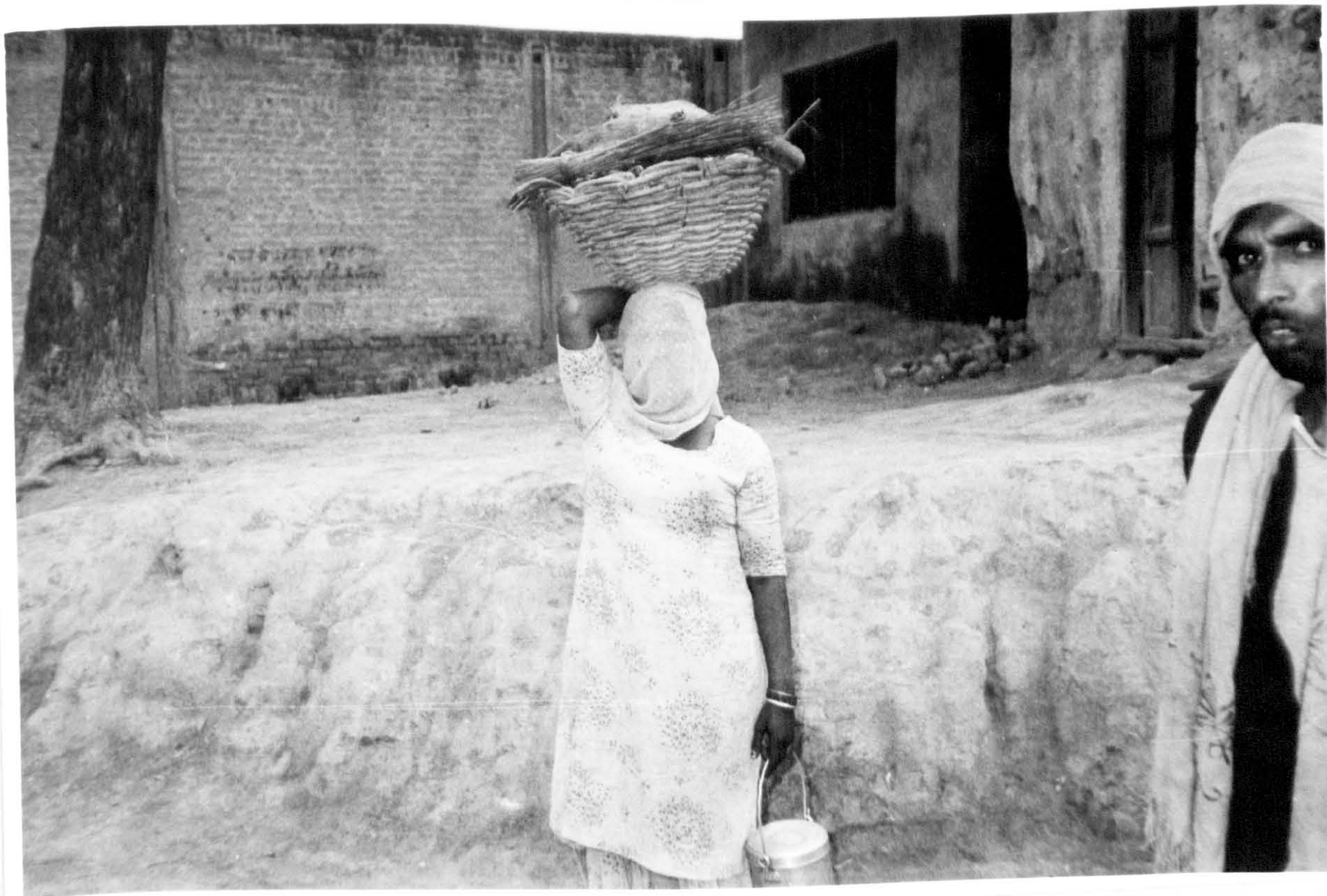
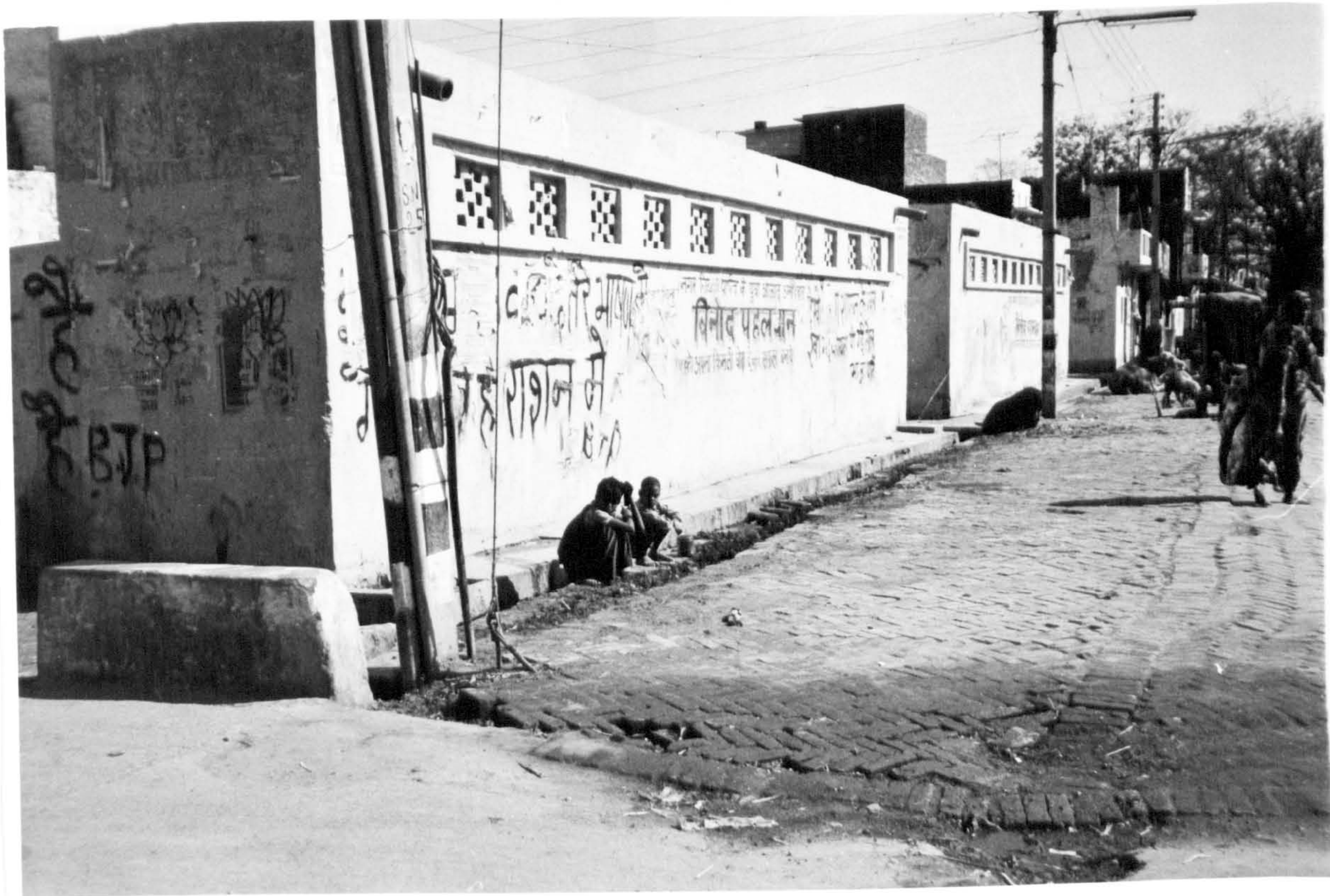
According to Hindus, night soil has the attributes of unseeability, unapproachability and untouchability. The unavoidable untouchability for washing after easing, has resulted in the left hand being ritually impure. The three attributes of

unseeability, unapproachability and untouchability extend to those who do the scavenging, namely, the Bhangis. For most people living in the villages, jungle-paani continues serving its ancient purpose. However, few, if any, bother to dig a hole and cover it over with earth after defecation. The night soil is left on the ground - in fields, behind clumps and bushes for all to see. Lately, state governments have encouraged villagers to have installed 'gobar' (cowdung) fuel gas plants with government financial help. Human excreta can be added to cowdung for production of fuel gas and the residues used for manuring the fields. On account of paucity of government resources and poverty of people (because part of the expense of the 'gobar' fuel plant is borne by the householder), it will be many decades before all the half a million villages in India have these cowdung gas plants.

In the towns and cities, disposal of human excreta continues to present formidable problems. Underground sewerage does not fully 'cover' or serve any urban area in India. The Metropolitan city of Delhi or (Greater Delhi) has a population of 6,220,406 living in 1,211,784 households. These households range from one room tenements for the poor, to the 400-room Rashtrapati Bhawan (President House) where the Rashtrapati of India, taking oath of office in the name of 90% of Indians who are poor or utterly poor lives in style and pomp².

5.2. SANITATION OF DELHI

The population of Delhi Municipal Corporation Urban area is 4,884,234 living in 954,411 households. I have used households, not houses, as many houses are shared by families. Only 60% of



1. Children easing themselves on the road.

2. Scavenging Bhangin.

the households have flush latrines. The rest of the population use dry toilets situated in the houses, public toilets which are few and far between and, even jungle-paani! Before I describe a dry toilet and the inhuman method of night soil disposal, I should repeat that 'Jungle-paani' on a limited and surreptitious scale is still practised in Delhi by those who are slum dwellers and have no latrines in their slums, or by some of those who live on the outer fringes of Metropolitan Delhi. They can be seen easing themselves, squatting behind a tree, bush or mound, along the roads connecting one suburb with another.

As to the old habit, prevalent among petty shopkeepers of urinating in the open 8" wide drains, one on each side of the street, running along the shop fronts, the situation is like this: open drains, at least in the main streets have given way to underground drainage. Most shops in main streets have indoor toilets at the rear of the shop, even if it does not smell clean. But in the side streets of the congested areas of the city, the old practice of urinating in open drains, on walls etc., persists. In a few places, the corporation has displayed notices prohibiting urinating in public places. These prohibitory notices are put up primarily because of the basic requirement of law that a regulation has to be brought to the attention of the public before it can be made applicable. Given the scarcity of public urinals it is not expected that the prohibitory notices will be complied with by someone under bladder pressure. Private notices are laughably forceful. Examples are: "Shoe beating will be administered to the person

urinating here." (on the private wall) or "Only donkeys urinate here." The place is too stinking for anyone to try his hand at graffiti. Even in the relatively modern areas, one may find a narrow lane between two buildings, damp and stinking with urine. These lanes are found at frequent intervals for the convenience of shoppers who may wish to make a short-cut to the next row of shops running parallel to the main shopping area, or the high street.

What is meant as pedestrians' convenience or short-cut is used as open air public convenience. For this state of affairs, the Municipal corporation is to blame, as the corporation has not provided enough public conveniences. N.R. Malkani, once the Chairman of Advisory Committee on scavenging conditions, noting the lack of public conveniences, writes that local health departments have become conscious about the need for clean drinking water, provision of surfaced road and street lighting, but have yet to become aware of the necessity for public hygiene and sanitation. (Malkani 1965; 122)

The location of the urinals is generally wrong. To quote Malkani (P 37) "But I have invariably found the location of the urinals in highly unsuitable spots. They are put up in isolated and out of the way places, where they are generally used for easing and then never cleaned." Another quaint aspect of public sanitation is the lack of conveniences for women. Delhi Municipal Corporation maintains 7,714 latrines and 2,591 urinals. But most of these are not for general public. They are for class IV public employees and their families in their colonies.



Bhangi Women.



Sweeper woman at work. Migrant labourers cooking on the roadside.

5.3. WORKING CONDITIONS

Until the introduction of flush latrines in 1950 all houses in Old Delhi had dry latrines. Even now the majority of houses in Old Delhi have dry latrines. A dry latrine in Delhi and in the surrounding states of Haryana, Utter Pradesh is like this: It is usually situated in a corner of the roof - the roofs in this part of India are flat, surrounded by 4-6 foot high walls. The latrine - known as Paikhana - is a small enclosure in a corner of the roof³. The enclosure has a cemented floor. About 15 inches above the floor, along one of the walls of the enclosure is a rectangular brick/concrete platform with 2 to 4 round openings in it. The floor is of cement and slopes towards an outside gutter which leads into the open drain in the street below. The last seat is used for washing after defecating.

Very few latrines have running water. But all have a tin or a brass tumbler just outside it, which the person using the latrine fills with water and takes with him. A bucket of water or an earthenware pitcher, locally known as 'matka' or 'ghara'⁴ is placed outside the latrine for the scavenger's use when he cleans the latrine. The latrine is directly accessible to the scavenger.

Here I should point out that scavenging in private houses is done mainly not by the male scavenger (Bhangi), but by the female scavenger (Bhangin). The male member of Bhangi caste have traditionally done physically strenuous work at farms in the villages and, in the towns, in the employment of the municipal committees; only after independence of India in 1947, women of the Bhangi caste came to



Bhangin carrying excreta in the wicker basket.

be employed by the local government. However, because of the heavy nature of the scavenging work in the municipal corporation not many Bhangins can do that work. The physically less heavy work involved in cleaning latrines has fallen to the Bhangins. The Bhangi may help his wife if he is off municipal duty or on strike at his place of work. He, of course, helps her if he, too, is doing private latrine cleaning.

Bhangin's work starts after 8 a.m. People do not want her to come earlier than that as persons using the latrine after she has cleaned it will leave the excreta lying exposed to flies until the following day.

The tools and techniques employed in her work are simple. These traditionally have been a wicker basket large enough to hold about five kilograms of night soil and garbage, a scraper and a hand broom. The Bhangin first goes to the garbage heap consisting of dry waste, vegetable peelings, hearth ash, this last item in those houses where the cooking fuel is coal, as gas in cylinders is not only more expensive but is also not available to all due to supply problems.

The hearth ash or dry earth is useful for covering the night soil. It makes it less sticky and, therefore, easy to remove with the scraper and the broom, it somewhat discourages the swarms of flies and reduces the stench marginally. In relatively well-off households where fuel gas is used⁵ or in working class households where kerosene stoves are in increasing use, the coal ash cannot be had. Here the Bhangin may mix garbage to the night soil.

Until a generation ago, the Bhangin would announce her arrival before entering the house. This was observed in order to avoid causing pollution to persons or things in the house. The idea and fear of pollution has weakened. The Bhangin enters the latrine, throws hearth ash or garbage on the excreta - black with flies especially in summer - the swarm escapes and settles on the latrine parapet. The Bhangin picks up her scraper and broom. The scraper is a piece of tin and the broom is made of a bundle of bamboo bristles tied with a string at one end. With the scraper and the broom she scoops up the excreta and transfers it into her wicker basket. The basket is plastered inside with clay and lined all around with cardboard to prevent the night soil seeping out. It may seep out despite the hearth ash and the garbage which is added to it. Some Bhangins have discarded wicker basket for a steel basin locally known as Tasla. However, most continue using the wicker basket covered inside with a polythene sheeting. To that extent technology of plastics has helped the Bhangin in her work. After transferring the night soil into her basket, the Bhangin rolls the earthenware pitcher full of water and washes and scrubs the seats and the floor of the latrine. The water flows down the gutter into the drain in the street. Some gutters are leaking and are a menace to the unwary passerby. Some households regularly use Phenyle disinfectant, others less frequently or not at all, depending on that particular household's income and/or level of sanitation consciousness.

During the monsoon, when it is raining, the Bhangin is not scrupulous about putting the night soil into the basket. There



Brief spells of rest in between work.

is a strong reason for that. The torrential rain will fill the lined basket/'tasla' and the contents will overflow onto her. Therefore, she washes the night soil down the drain. The caste Hindus grumble about the "irresponsibility and lack of care" on the part of the Bhangin. Very few among the caste Hindus realize that working conditions leave no other alternative to the Bhangin for the disposal of the night soil in monsoon rains. Even at non-monsoon times of the year, which roughly is nine months, upper caste householders find fault with the Bhangin e.g. she uses too much or too little water, splashes it outside the boundary of the latrine, and so on. All households insist that the Bhangin should enter the latrine with a 'clean tasla', that is, should empty the contents taken from a previous house into the large wicker basket placed in the street. Some households have their own bamboo-bristle broom and the Bhangin is forbidden to use her own which is considered to be multi-polluted. Households having flush latrines invariably have their own bamboo-bristle brooms. (The caste Hindus are not alone in this grumbling attitude. Muslims and other 'upper' communities echo the same grumble. I have noticed a not very dissimilar attitude here in Britain towards the dustmen. In the area where I live, the Council provides every household with one or two black plastic bags for the weekly collection of garbage. Few householders care to tie up the top of the bag. I understand that it is the standing complaint by the dustmen that people seldom wrap up broken glass when they throw it into the garbage bags. The very word dustmen reflects the 'high caste' attitude towards the garbage collectors.)

For all this filth, the Bhangin is paid two rupees a month (one rupee is equivalent to 6 pence) in Old Delhi, depending on the size and the circumstances of the family. The monthly payment is about 10 rupees in modern suburbs, but is nowhere more than 20 rupees a month. Modern suburbs have water-borne latrines. The Bhangin 'cleans' the sanitary bowl in order to earn her monthly pittance.

India's plastic industry makes everything from combs to protective coating for rockets but I have never seen a toilet brush in plastic or other material. There is no market for it as caste Hindus (also Muslims, Christians etc) leave the thorough scrubbing of the modern sanitary bowl to the Bhangin.

5.4. NIGHT SOIL DEPOTS

When the large wicker basket gets filled with night soil and garbage, the Bhangin carries it to the depot which is a half-way house to the dumping ground. For garbage, etc., from street and roads, there are 5 feet high brick enclosures. They look like sentry posts, but are not. Every town has several night soil depots. Delhi Municipal Corporation has 9 such depots.

From the private latrine to the dump, it is the Bhangi caste's lot to come in contact with excreta, "The depots are nothing but big heaps of such filth and become plague spots for the neighbourhood." (Malkani 1965; 58). As such they are initially built on the outskirts of towns. With growth of urbanization these outskirts cease to be outer areas.



1. Garbage Dhalao amidst houses of upper caste poor.

2. Garbage Depot. Shops and houses on the right. Also a urinal.

There is always a considerable time lag before these depots can be shifted to more outlying areas. In any case, there is a limit to the distance which a Bhangi or Bhangin may walk with the head load of night soil. The result is that these night soil depots are sometimes seen amidst built-up areas.

The Bhangin need not carry the heavy load of filth on her head, to the depot, if only she had a wheel barrow. Not every Bhangin has the wheel barrow provided free of cost by the corporation. The corporation does not have the funds for the requisite number of wheel barrows. To get a wheel barrow from corporation is not without hassle. Private scavengers have got to fill in the forms, produce their photographs and then a survey of their Mohallas is done by MCD Official, before the wheel barrow is given. Even if every Bhangin had a wheel barrow, she would still have to carry the excreta load from the roof top latrine to the street below. If the high caste people want their latrine on the roof and out of sight, the Bhangin too carries the excreta in open pan on her head - out of her sight. No one in the corporation has thought of a covered bucket for this purpose. A covered plastic bucket costs approximately Rs. 20 - (£1) and about half that, if made of steel. For the poor Bhangin it will be a costly equipment to buy from her own resources.

There is need to organise women in the private sweeping/scavenging. In the late sixties, a prominent trade union of sweepers organised a strike on behalf of private sweepers for increase in wages. But this strike had little effect. Existing trade

unions of Bhangis mostly look after the interests of sweepers in Municipal employment. There is need for an organisation or a trade union exclusively for sweepers in private employment, so that Bhangi women may become conscious of their rights and learn to fight for them. There are very few men for whom private scavenging is the full-time occupation.

NOTES

1. But the village women, including those from the relatively well-off families prefer jungle 'paani' to the private latrine. They go out in groups and some of them squat near one another (I have noticed this particularly among women of rural Panjab, Haryana and Rajasthan). This might have its origins as a safeguard against any would be molester. However, the group easing themselves and also gossiping in low tones point to social interaction; What that would be is indicated by the topic of conversation which is usually grumble about mother-in-law/daughter-in-law or sister-in-law - the sort of grumble that one would expect in joint families in the rural context. Conversation started in group-easing may continue until well on the way back to the village and may include topics such as children, dowry, the 'shameless' manners of the younger generation and tittle - tattle about pregnancies. This latter causes suppressed giggles among the very young.

2. Rashtrapati Bhawan, formerly Viceroy House was built by the British rulers of India. India's democratic rulers have perpetuated the visible distance between the rich and poor. In Chandigarh, the new capital of Panjab built in the fifties, the large bungalows of the car owning high government officials are within walking distance of the Secretarial complex and the High Court buildings, while the junior officials and peons have their government houses situated at a distance of 3 to 4 miles from these buildings. The plan of the city was approved by the central government headed by the late Jawahar Lal Nehru. Nehru did much for the good of India. He was proud of Chandigarh. One wonders why he did not notice the flaw in the planning of Chandigargh as it would mean avoidable hardship to the bicycle owning Junior officials.

3. In other parts of India e.g. in Madhya Pradesh and more generally in South India, the latrines are on the ground level. A tin receptacle is placed under the toilet seat. The receptacle is accessible from outside through an opening in the wall which is covered with a hinged lid. The urine, the washing - after - easing - water and sometimes night soil/flows into an

outside cesspool which is emptied with a tin by the scavenger, once a week.

As to the merit of having latrine on the roof, the consensus is that it is open to sunshine and air and is out of sight.

4. North Indian summers are torrid. About 50% of the inhabitants in Delhi own a refrigerator. The rest of the people use matka for cooling the drinking water. The water slowly seeps out of the porous earthenware 'matka', gets evaporated quickly, thus cooling the water in the 'matka'. Two to four 'matkas' are needed during the summer. After the summer is over, these 'matkas' are placed outside the latrine. They were used for storing grain rice etc. But the city poor now are too poor to buy food in quantity. In the villages, however, old 'matkas' are still used by the peasants for storing grain.

5. A few - very few - relatively rich households still have the old style hearths in which firewood and, sometimes, charcoal are burnt for cooking. These fuels are expensive compared to fossil fuel, coal.

CHAPTER 6

SANITATION OF DELHI - OFFICIAL SWEEPING

6.1. MUNICIPAL BODIES

The Union Territory of Delhi is fringed by urban centres of Faridabad, Ballabgarh and Bahadurgarh in Haryana and Ghaziabad and Loni in Utter Pradesh. The Territory has Delhi urban and Delhi rural areas. The former is the metropolis and is administered by three municipal bodies: MCD, NDMC and Cantonment Board. According to 1981 census, the DMC covers 80.80% of area and 90.15% of population of the total area and population of urban Delhi. The areas of NDMC and CB are almost the same (about 43 sq km) but the population of New Delhi is over five times that of Delhi Cantonment.

The uneven distribution of area and population of the various zones of a city creates problems of providing amenities and services. This is true of any city, be it Inner London, Calcutta's Dharmtullah, Bombay's Bhindi Bazar or Delhi's City-Sadar - Paharganj. For instance, according to 1961 census, Delhi's inner city area - City-Sadar-Paharganj - with an area of 12.95 sq km (only 4% of Delhi's urban area) had a population of 71600 or 30.4% of urban Delhi population. The density of population is almost double the average of Calcutta Municipality. (Delhi District Census Handbook 1961 P 20). According to a survey carried out by the Bharat Sewak Samaj, the average density of population for Old Delhi is between 400 to 600 persons per acre and in some of its areas the density is even

as high as 1100 per acre or 7,04,000 per sq. mile (Misra and Sarna 1979; 27). Compared to this, New Delhi with an area of 40.74 sq km or 13% of total urban area had a population of only 2,61,000 or 11% of total urban population. Density per square km in inner city area was 55,256 compared to 6120 for New Delhi. The zone-wise data are not available in 1981 census but the situation has not changed. Unlike many inner city areas in the West which are in decline, Delhi's city-Sadar-Paharganj continues to be commercially very active.

The city has grown from 200,000 in 1901 to 4.6 million in 1971 and 6.2 million in 1981. The spurts in growth were in 1931-41 (From 450,000 to 700,000) and again in 1941-1951 (700,000 to over 1,400,000) of which 500,000 were refugees from West Panjab. The population was 2,359,408 in 1961, 4,065,698 in 1971 and 6,220,406 in 1981. The 106.5 percent growth during the decade 1941-51 was the highest in an urban area in India. (DDA Draft Master plan, Vol. 1. 1960). Since 1941, the decennial percentage increase has been in the order of over 50 percent.

6.2. OFFICIAL SWEEPING

Sanitation in Delhi is at two levels: Private and Public. Private sweeping is that pertaining to private dwellings; public sweeping encompasses streets, roads, public latrines, garbage depots and dumping grounds. In private sweeping, a Bhangi works as self-employed, his Jajmani rights over households and Mohallas functioning in the background. When engaged in official sweeping, the Bhangi is an employee of the Municipal Corporation, has no Jajmani rights and is subject to the rules

and regulations of the corporation for the good sanitation management of the city. There is a middle level where the Bhangis work as sweepers, that is, as employees in various departments of the government, the Indian Railways, the nationalised banks and the large private industrial enterprises. At the middle level, Bhangis as employees of those departments, etc., do not have Jajmani rights. At the public and middle level of hereditary work of sweeping, Bhangis lose the protection afforded by Jajmani. Therefore, they participate in trade union activity; this latter activity is through their caste organisation, for reasons which will be discussed under Bhangi politics.

Sanitation of Delhi is the responsibility of the local self-government, the municipal government. From early times, in the cities of India, a municipal type of organisation and, with that, street sweeping has existed in various stages of Indian history. The capital cities were properly cleaned as they were the seats of local chiefs and their nobility, the Rajahs and the Nawabs. These cities had a bureaucratic organisation that ran the city affairs, including sanitation. The Moghuls, for instance had a system of municipal administration based on the mohalla or neighbourhood complex of lanes with exits into a main street. (Tinker 1954)

Sanitation of Delhi city is under the jurisdiction of Municipal Corporation of Delhi, in abbreviations, M.C.D. Like other local self-governing bodies, the municipalities, Delhi Municipal Corporation is responsible for sanitation, water

supply, roads, street lighting, public parks, libraries, schools especially the primary schools and the staff quarters, that is, accommodation for its employees. The newer functions of M.C.D. are labour welfare, child welfare and family planning.

Delhi Municipal Committee was formed in February 1863¹, although there was some sort of municipality even before that. The municipality was formed under Act XXVI of 1850, the notification was made by the Panjab Government, as during 1858-1912, Delhi was not the capital of India, but a district of the Panjab. The structure, organisation and powers of Delhi municipality were changed from time to time and reflected both the growing needs of the city and the political development in India. Delhi became a Chief Commissioner's province after the transfer of the capital of India to New Delhi in 1911. After Independence, Delhi first became a Part C state, then in 1956, with the re-organisation of the states on linguistic basis, Delhi became a Union Territory. Central government has always had a strong control over the affairs and destiny of Delhi. Thus, like the Assembly of Part C Delhi State 1952-56, the present Metropolitan Council is a mere discussion body. The central government has exercised real power through the Chief Commissioner (upto 1956) and, since then, the Lt. Governor. Delhi Municipal Committee was formed in 1863. With Delhi becoming the capital of India in 1911, various local bodies were formed corresponding to the neighbouring areas of Old Delhi: the Notified Area Committee, Civil Station in 1913; New Delhi Municipal Committee in 1916; the Notified Area Committee, Fort in 1924; the West Delhi Notified Area Committee

in 1943; the Shahdara Municipal Committee in 1943. In 1938, Delhi Municipal Committee pressed for either a responsible provincial legislature or a corporation form of local administration. "The purpose of establishing a corporation would have been not only to expand the power of the municipality but also to amalgamate the various local authorities into one municipality. (Enquiry Committee Report 1946; 6-7)

The long overdue municipal reorganisation took place in 1958, when all but two of the local authorities were amalgamated to form Delhi Municipal Corporation. The excepted two local bodies were New Delhi Municipal Committee and Delhi Cantonment Board. The corporation covered all the area of the union territory of Delhi, excepting the area under the jurisdiction of the above two bodies. The corporation has under its wing the semi-autonomous undertakings: Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking; Delhi Transport Undertaking or DTU now called Delhi Transport Service or DTS² and; Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking or D.E.S.U.

6.3. STRUCTURE OF MCD

The Corporation is headed by the Mayor. Both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are elected annually. Sections 42 and 43 of the Act describe the functions of the corporation which are obligatory and discretionary. The obligatory functions are performed by five statutory committees:

- (1) The Standing Committee, the most powerful of all;
- (2) Delhi Electric Supply Committee; (3) Delhi Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Committee; (4) Education Committee;

(5) Rural Areas Committee. These Committees consist of elected representatives and official nominees, the majority resting with the elected representatives. In addition, there are special committees for Medical Relief and Public Health, Gardens, Assurances, Appointments, Promotions and Disciplinary matters, etc.

The executive powers of the corporation are exercised by the Commissioner, appointed by the Central Government for 5 years. He is assisted by a Deputy Commissioner and three Assistant Commissioners, besides the departmental heads. The Assistant Commissioners supervise the work of the 10 Zonal councils.

The relationship between the Corporation and the Central Government is similar to that between a local municipal government and the state government. The sources of revenue for the Corporation are government grants, shares of certain central taxes, municipal rates, rents, fees etc. The financial dependence of the Corporation on Central Government and Delhi Administration (which is a creature of central government) undermines its autonomy. As a matter of fact, the Central Government has a continuing role in the affairs of the MCD. The government appoints the specialist members of the statutory committees, approves the appointment of the principal officers of the Corporation, arbitrates between the Corporation and other local bodies of Delhi Territory in respect of supply of water and electricity and disposal of sewage. Under its reserve powers, the Central Government can interfere on any matter and enforce its views if it is of the opinion that any duty which the Corporation is obliged to perform has not been

performed or performed in an imperfect, insufficient or unsuitable manner (Corporation Act 1957; Section 487-88). If the affairs of the corporation are in a very bad state, the government can suspend the corporation, take over its functions and report to Parliament (Section 490).

It is Delhi Municipal Corporation's scavenging functions that are a component of this study. Nevertheless, a few words about NDMC and Delhi Cantonment Board: NDMC consists of 11 members - all nominated - of these the President and four other members are official and 6 are non officials. They are appointed by the Lt. Governor who can give directions to NDMC. The Metropolitan Council makes financial allocation.

Delhi Cantonment functions like other such Boards. It consists of seven nominated and seven elected members and is headed by the Officer Commanding Station.

6.4. ORGANISATION OF SWEEPING

This comes under the Health Department of MCD and sweeping/scavenging is done by the Bhangis employed by MCD and New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC). The area of Delhi and parts of New Delhi covered by MCD are divided into seven Zones (Already listed in the chapter on Delhi City).

The posts of the sweepers go under various categories which are descriptive of the jobs performed. The categories are Road Sweepers, Latrine Sweepers, Drain Sweepers, Lorry Sweepers, (known also as Lorry Beldars) and sweepers of Sewergang. The

last category is under the administration of Water supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking.

Road Sweeping:- Sweepers are sent out in teams or squads, which are assigned to the corporation's sub-offices in various city Zones. Each team is responsible for cleanliness of streets in its area. Garbage collected from the streets and lanes is piled up in convenient corners and is then collected by MCD lorries (A similar procedure is discernible in the weekly piles of black plastic garbage bags here in Britain. These bags are collected at convenient points from houses and shops by the dustmen and then flung into the back of the slowly moving, short stopping garbage lorry). Sweepers who load the garbage into lorries and then unload the lorries at dumping grounds are called Lorry Beldars. Road and street sweeping is also done by women sweepers. Those Bhangi women, who have not been able to make full use of the positive protective discrimination, fall back upon their caste occupation. A sweeper's job in the corporation employment (as also in Railways and other public and large private establishments) is relatively attractive. It is better paid. A permanent job is pensionable. Regardless of sex, a municipal sweeper can rent a corporation flat.

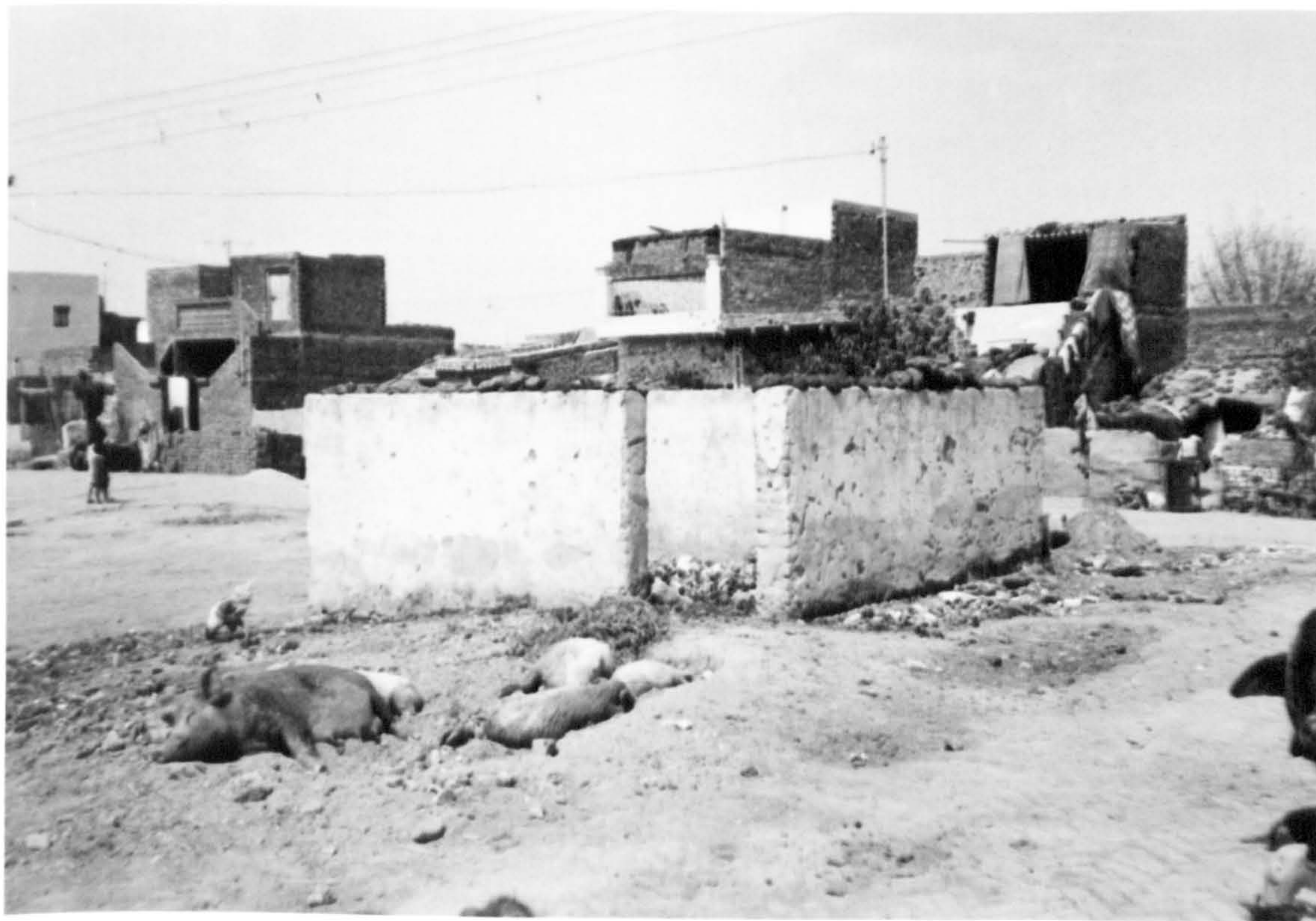
The Corporation sweepers are supposed to clean each road, street and lane twice a day by sweeping up the dirt with a stiff broom. They certainly do the sweeping atleast once a day that is in the morning and a semblance of sweeping in the afternoon. The garbage collected is carried to the Dhalao



Road Sweeping, in Kashmiri Gate.



Road sweeping in Kashmiri Gate. Bhangi man is Corporation employee. His wife is helping him, while the son is watching. The tannery is owned by a person of Varma sub-caste, an upper caste - Vaishya Varna.



Garbage Dhalaos; pigs basking in the sun.



1. Garbage Depot.. Bougainvillae over the wall.

2. Sweepers' house above the garbage depot in Chandni Chowk.



Family life inside garbage depot. Mother is away doing private scavenging. Father works in the garbage depot. Children in a corner of the depot.



Garbage depot in Navin Karim in Sadar Bazar zone. HAND is the election symbol of Congress-1.



The usually stinking public toilets in Navin Karim. Above the toilets, sweeper's house.

(which is a shed and is the collection point for garbage) in wheel barrows provided by the Corporation. Self employed sweepers who collect garbage from households also carry garbage and night soil to the Dhalaos usually in a basket or shallow bowl. A deviant private sweeper who may feel tempted to leave his garbage in any odd place is quickly and easily detectable by other sweepers, including those in Corporation employment who will not permit this practice as its continuation will increase their work load.

Drain sweepers clean the gutters and drains with long-handled brooms made of stiff twigs, as a stream of water is directed into the clogged gutters by a man carrying a goatskin waterbag. The waterman, known as Mashki or Bahishti³ is not necessarily from the Bhangi caste. He may be from some other low castes. He does not lose his caste ranking because he has no direct contact with polluted objects.

Road sweeping is known as dry sweeping among the Bhangis and is considered less dirty than wet sweeping as it does not entail contact with urine and faeces. Bhangis who do dry sweeping might think themselves as better placed (job-wise) than Bhangis who do wet sweeping. But to the orthodox among the high castes there is no such distinction as 'dry' and 'wet' sweeping. To the orthodox, a Bhangi is a Bhangi, atleast when he is carrying the tools of his job. At other times, no one - not even the orthodox among the high caste - bother or dare to ask a fellow commuter what his caste is. It is now considered bad manners to inquire of a stranger as to what his caste is

in order to avoid his possible polluting touch. In this there has been a change in social interaction certainly in the urban areas.

Bhangis in the job category of latrine sweepers do wet cleaning. They clean public latrines built by MCD and NDMC. These latrines which have flush system are connected to the underground drainage. Public latrines are those, not many in number, which are for the 'convenience' of the general public. But there is a substantial number of another category of public or communal⁴ latrines which one finds in clusters of 4 to 6 cubicles in government and/or municipal colonies meant for class IV⁵ category of public employees. The number of these so-called communal latrines is grossly inadequate for the needs of the people who use them. Those under stress, may relieve themselves in corridors. And when the flush system breaks down, the plight is unimaginable. Public urinals, too, present a sorry sight with cesspools. Even hutment dwellers (Jhuggi-Jhompi wallahs) have communal toilets provided by the corporation. In these areas of the city, like others where the low economic groups live, children are socialised to defecate and urinate directly into the street gutters until they are old enough to use the communal latrines. In those areas of the city which do not have adequate drainage system, the liquid waste flows into a cesspool or a trench. These are emptied - bucketful by bucketful - in tankers. No wonder, a Bhangi wants to put off the evil day when he is required to do wet cleaning.

The Lorry Beldars' Job may be categorised as dry sweeping. It was not so before the change-over to flush system in Delhi.



1. Garbage being dumped in depots.

2. Garbage being transferred in lorries.

Heaps of garbage, collected in Dhalaos or garbage depots are transferred to garbage lorries which are then driven off to the dumping grounds. Lorry Beldars load and unload the lorries with shovels, called Belcha. That probably explains their job category as Beldars or shovellers.

Garbage depots are emptied twice a week as otherwise they will become a health hazard. The Beldar sweepers get enveloped in the garbage dust during loading and unloading; the houses around these depots get an extra dose of stench.

Bhangis in the sewer gang maintain the sewage system in good flow. They work with a variety of tools and implements of which the most handy is a flexible bamboo stick which can pierce through and loosen obstructions in the sewer pipes. A blocked sewer would result in the drainage water overflowing through the manhole into the open. Hence, regular desilting of sewer lines, which is the responsibility of the Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Undertaking.

Sweeping in MCD is organised in administrative hierarchy. Road sweepers, latrine sweepers, drain sweepers are organised into work teams. In a single ward there may be upto 100 sweepers, who are supervised by three sanitary constables (Safai Darogas) and four sanitary guides. Each ward has a Sanitary Inspector and two assistant Sanitary Inspectors. The Sanitary Inspector and his two assistants are trained in public health and their duties extend beyond mere street sanitation. They oversee that the Health Department's requirements in regard to sanitation in



1. Garbage being transported in bullock carts.

2. Sweepers opening sewers. A Bhangin and her wheel barrow.

public eating places are adhered to. Shopkeepers who display food in unhygienic conditions are brought to book by the Sanitary Inspectors.

Safai Darogas and sanitary guides may be promoted from among sweepers who meet the educational requirements for the training course. Often they belong to the higher castes. Their functions are supervisory. As supervisors they can make the work situation for the sweeper difficult and are able to influence the job security of the individual sweepers in their work team.

Now a days, in the corporation, sweepers men/women are first employed on daily wages. According to the seniority list, sweepers are then made permanent. The lists are so long, that sweepers have to work for 2 to 3 years on daily wages, before they are made permanent. As daily wagers, they are not entitled to any benefits like paid leave, maternity leave, pension, provident fund and uniforms. Their wages are 11 Rs. 60 Paise a day (or 75 pence).

Recruitment:- Sweepers are recruited by a panel of municipal officials of the particular Zone. Jobs are not advertised. Kin - connections play an important role in the recruitment. A sweeper working in the particular Zone comes to know of vacancies and helps his relations get the job.

In addition to the daily wagers, there is another category of male/female sweepers called substitute sweepers. Substitutes work strictly in temporary capacity. Substitutes are employed

when there is extra work, like cleanliness campaign or window dressing on special occasions like Republic Day, an international conference or the visit of a foreign head of state. Employment of substitutes depends upon the availability of the work.

The study group of the National Commission on labour note that there is a growing trend among municipal bodies to discourage the recruitment of women sweepers in view of the liabilities involved in their employment, like maternity benefits. Delhi Corporation officials denied this. The ratio of male female sweepers is 55: 45. Sweepers, however, complain of irregularity in distribution of uniforms, soaps, oil, unjustified deductions in pay and leave.

Women are members of the one or the other sweepers' union. They have successfully participated in strikes and demonstrations. As a result of militant trade union activities, the sweepers have won improvement in pay, working conditions, health and pensions benefits.

Corporation sweepers complain of corruption in matters concerning their job and work. The prospective candidate for a sweeper's job has to pay money for recruitment, the rate varies according to the type of job, permanent or temporary or day work⁶. According to my informants the going rate for a sweeper's job is 500 Rupees or more, to the officials in the hierarchy. Sweepers on daily wages are in even worse position. They pay 200 Rupees for the opportunity to get paid work and have to pay an agreed amount periodically in order that their job gets

renewed every time it is supposed to expire. Money changes hand when a sweeper on daily wage is taken on permanent job.

The sweeper's day starts with a roll call. In the past it used to be four times a day, but following protests and threat of strike by the sweepers, the roll call was reduced to twice daily. The Assistant Sanitary Inspector is responsible for registering attendance of the sweepers in his ward. When a sweeper is absent without reason for a day or part of a day, his pay is deducted. For continued absence without reason, he is liable to dismissal. Normally the sweeper's job in MCD and NDMC is a secure one. As most sweepers are also engaged in private sweeping, either directly, or indirectly as helpers to their families, it is important for them to have part of the day off from Corporation work. This gives rise to hush money; the sweeper who takes time off pays his immediate superior a fixed amount. This money is handed over not in person, but through a fellow sweeper who does the collection.

To prevent this bribery and favouritism, the Assistant Sanitary Inspectors, Sanitary Inspector and even the Health Officer make surprise visits when the roll call is taken. This ensures the presence of sweepers during roll call, but cannot prevent the subsequent disappearance of favoured sweepers on their private businesses⁷. The sweepers call it corruption in the Corporation, they forget that they, too, are partly responsible for it. This corruption feeds on the mutual benefit between the interested sweepers and some of their immediate bosses. The Corporation as Corporation does not favour it. On occasions, the defaulting

officials and the sweepers have been suspended from duty and even have lost their jobs. But the vicious cycle goes on. It is difficult to detect and prove this corruption. If a street sweeper or one who cleans public latrines were to do his work quickly and carelessly, and is then truant for a couple of hours, he will hardly get noticed. It is different with sweepers of sewer gang. They work in small gangs and cannot afford to neglect their work. But sewers do not block up often and there is all the scope for sewer sweepers to engage in private sweeping, after arriving at some arrangement with the immediate superiors.

Job-Rotation:- A latrine sweeper's work is the most repugnant and the hardest is of those working on garbage trucks. The street sweeper is perhaps the luckiest of all. But good fortune is not everlasting. The jobs are mutually transferable, though transfers are not frequent. Sweepers of sewer gangs always stay in their particular job. It is somewhat specialised and is, moreover, controlled by a separate department.

Contract System:- Removal of garbage to dumping grounds used to be under Municipal contract to individual Bhangis. However, every one was not able to bid for contract and only the well-off Bhangis had the means to put in tenders. The contract which was for one year varied in its monetary value from 200 Rupees to 800 Rupees per month, depending on the work load of the particular area. The contractor Bhangi hired other Bhangis for the work at the average wage of 30 Rupees a month. A contractor whose work was not satisfactory had to pay penalty which was deducted

by the Municipal Committee from the monthly amount payable to him. In severe cases of bad work or continued unsatisfactory work, the contractor was blacklisted and had no chance of securing a contract the following year.

From the Dhalaos and garbage sheds the garbage was transported to dumping grounds in bullock-carts provided by the Bhangi contractor themselves. During the Second World War, as Delhi expanded, bullock-carts were finding it difficult to transport the garbage to dumping grounds which were further away from the collection points. Consequently in 1944, the Municipal Committee introduced lorries for removing garbage from certain selected Dhalaos, while for the rest the bullock-carts continued to be used as in the past. However, if a contractor failed to complete his work of transporting the contents of the Dhalao allotted to him, the Municipal Committee would send its garbage lorries and charge the contractor 3 Rupees per lorry load, in addition to penalty.

In 1958, contract system for garbage removal was abolished. Delhi and its fast growing new suburbs had extended the limits of the city and, with them, the new dumping grounds were far beyond the easy reach of the bullock-carts. The Bhangi contractors did not have the financial resources to provide garbage lorries. In any case, garbage removal under contract to private individuals would have been anachronic when the cleanliness of the city was municipalised. The all-lorry system for garbage transportation, owned and operated by the MCD, was introduced. The contractors among Bhangis were adversely

affected. But the employees of the garbage contractors now became corporation employees and thus entitled to security in respect of job, earnings, sickness and retirement like the other Bhangis employed in sanitation work.

In the beginning there was one garbage depot on Kutub Road, called Kutub Road Platform. It was the place where garbage from all over the city was dumped and loaded in railway garbage wagons in the nearby railway yard and taken to the dumping ground near Badli Village. With the increase in population and the expansion of the city, 9 garbage depots and 7 dumping grounds came into existence and the garbage is now carried in lorries to the dumping ground. At the dumping grounds, sweepers use hand implements with long handles e.g. Panchagri, Dhreshi, Charphali. For heavy work, there are bulldozers.

In 1978, sanitation was taken over by the Engineering Department of the Corporation. Mechanical devices are being introduced but most of the loading and unloading is still done manually. Bulldozers are used to direct and shift the refuse at the dumping grounds. Deodorants and disinfectants are sprayed on the garbage as part of the "anti-fly-measures". This spraying is also done by sweepers who work without any protective masks. A MCD official said that mechanical loader/unloaders are un-economical in the open areas, are difficult to operate in the congested city areas and, in any case, people have to be preferred to machines.



Open drains and storm water drains.



Garbage being levelled at dumping ground. Houses of the rich in the background.

6.5. WORK LOAD

MCD employs 22,000 sweepers, both male and female. It maintains 30,000 seats in community latrines, about 2600 urinals and 12,000 street bins.

MCD has given 12,600 wheel-barrows to its sweeper employees. Refuse is collected in 156 Dalas and in 1049 large dustbins. MCD has deployed 240 trucks to collect refuse from the Dalas and dustbins. Of the 240 trucks, 17 are mechanical loaders and 15 tipper-trolley types.

In MCD area, there are 1854 km of sewers, 161 km of drains and 2822 km of storm water drains. Sweepers are assigned their work depending on the type of area and population density. On this criteria, a sweeper is required to clean 2300 Sq. m. to 4600 Sq. m. of area. In South Delhi, where there is no congestion, a sweeper may be required to clean 9200 Sq. m. every day.

6.6. EARNINGS OF CORPORATION SWEEPERS

All the four categories of sweepers, irrespective of sex, have the same pay scale which at present is Rupees 196-232 per month. There are allowances like Dearness Allowance (First introduced during the Second World War), housing etc. The total earning is Rupees 466 per month. Since many sweepers are engaged in private sweeping jobs, the total income of an average Bhangi family is usually more. But it is nowhere near 900 Rupees as recorded by Philip Oldenburg in his book, "The Big City Government in India" 1976.

Work Uniforms:- All categories of Corporation male sweepers get two trousers, two shirts and a turban every year. Female sweepers get two cotton sarees. For winter wear, one woollen jacket, two pairs of woollen socks are issued to both men and women, every alternate year; also a pair of shoes and sandals.

Allowances:- Road and drain sweepers get 5 Rupees a month as Dirt Allowance. But they do not get any soap, as according to the authorities, the work of the road and drain sweepers is not dirty enough to need these cleansing agents. However, lorry sweepers, latrine sweepers and sweepers on dumping grounds get in addition to the 20 Rupee Dirt Allowance, 2 cakes of bathing soap, 1kg of washing soap and $\frac{1}{2}$ kg of vegetable oil.

The work uniforms and allowances are given to sweepers who are employed on permanent basis. Those working on daily wages do not get these 'perks'. Sweepers have provident fund and family pension scheme. They are entitled to casual leave, medical leave, leave with half pay, as per central government rules for class IV employees. In 1982, an insurance scheme was started under which sweepers are covered by life insurance for upto 10,000 Rs. Women are entitled to 40 days of maternity leave; the corporation has recognised the general Indian tradition of 40 days rest for women in confinement.

NOTES

1. For the first 60 years of DMC history, see Madho Parshad: The History of the Delhi Municipality 1863 - 1921, Allahabad press 1921. There is, the Political History of Delhi in Hindi, published by District Congress Committee, 1934, and several pamphlets by the DMC.
2. Americans, Russians and Indians have one thing in common - a craze for abbreviations. DTS is a precarious transport service. According to critics it stands for Do not Trust Us.
3. Mushk is urban name for goatskin water bag. Mashki is the person who carries the goatskin water bag. Bahishti is Persian for one from paradise; it underlines the life giving water, in a hot country.
4. George Orwell has discussed the twisted use and meaning of common-place words in his essay "Politics and the English language". In India, the word communal, in pre-independence politics, meant politics of Muslim League and the Hindu Sabha reaction to that.
5. In India, job classification numeral in government departments is in inverse proportion to the monetary and social worth of the job and, (subconsciously?) is patterned on the caste system. Even the Indian Railways until the early 1950's had four classification of compartments, First, Second, Intermediate and Third. The class IV category of employees do not deserve separate toilet to their one-room tenement.
6. Applicants for the various jobs in government service, both central and state, are required to enclose with their applications non-refundable postal orders. The money, apparently, is for the running expenses of the Public Service Commissions. This is a tax on the unemployed and the job-seekers.
7. It is common knowledge that in Britain, there is considerable practice of work avoidance, frequent and long visits to toilets, overtime work when hardly any work is done, even

falsification of time sheets. A carpenter foreman in the now defunct Greater London Council (GLC - London's equivalent of DMC) was dismissed because he refused to be transferred as he was unpopular among the work force who were getting away with incorrect overtime payments. He, however, got his job back. The perks of false overtime among drivers of the British Rail are notorious and even led to a few criminal court cases in 1981.

CHAPTER 7

JAJMANI RELATIONS AND THE BHANGIS

7.1. JAJMANI SYSTEM

Caste relations in traditional Indian society have been regulated by Jajmani system. Jajmani system is the economic expression of caste. Castes^{are} mutually exclusive, yet enter into service relationships with one another. These service relations are Jajmani relations. W.H. Wiser¹, in his book, "The Hindu Jajmani System", published in 1936, gave a descriptive analysis and evaluation of this system. He defines Jajmani system - "These service relationships reveal that the priest, the bard, accountant, goldsmith, florist, vegetable grower etc., are the Jajmans of these other castes. In turn each of these castes has a form of service to perform for others. In this manner the various castes of a Hindu village in North India are interrelated in service capacity. Each serves the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant, each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes. Which is his "Jajmani" or "birt". This system of interrelatedness in service within the Hindu community is called the Hindu Jajmani system." (Wiser 1936; 10)

Beidelman does not agree with Wiser's emphasis upon equal dependence. He underlines the hierarchical nature of caste and the feudalistic, coercive nature of traditional village economy a non-cash, local economy - based on cultivable land which is mainly owned by the upper castes, especially the Kshatriya caste. (Jats of North Western India are included in Vaishya/Kshatriya caste). The Shudra caste (artisans, etc.) and the

untouchables (Bhangis, Chamars) provide services and labour to the land-owning upper castes. The upper castes in this economic context are known by the name of Jajman and the lower castes by the name Kamin. Students of Indian Anthropology have almost uncritically translated into English, the North Western Indian words Jajman and Kamin, as patron and client respectively. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, Patron means: one who countenances, protects, or gives influential support to (person, cause, art, etc); (shop), regular customer; (Roman antiquarian) former owner of freed slave; protector of a client. Client means: (Roman antiquarian) plebian under protection of noble dependent, hanger on, employer of lawyer; employer of any professional man. Since the Kamin is, not an 'employer' but is an 'employee',² the only possible meaning reflecting his status is that of the hanger on. The patron could be taken in the sense of the Roman antiquarian meaning of patron, provided the Kamins were a freed slave. The Hindus will vehemently deny that slavery existed in India.

There is the further difficulty that a Brahmin as practising priest, although a Kamin in relation to his, say Kshatriya Jajman, is not called a Kamin. In the Jajmani nexus, the Brahmin is Purohita, which in Sanskrit means 'pur' (other) and 'hita' (well-being) or, one who acts for the well-being of others. (Dubois equates Purohita with priest, thereby accepting and describing the Brahmin's priestly functions. He does not see these functions in the Jajmani - Kamin spectrum. (Dubois 1906)

Before going further into the analysis of Jajmani system, we need to understand the meaning of the words Jajman and Kamin. These two words, which described the economic relationship between the landowning upper castes and the artisan and labouring lower castes, were in use mainly in North Western part of the Subcontinent, that is in the pre - 1947 Panjab of British India (comprising the present Pakistani Panjab, Indian Panjab, Haryana and Himachal), the contiguous districts of Western Uttar Pradesh, and the Jammu provinces of Jammu and Kashmir state. The word Jajman is vernacularisation of the Sanskrit Yajaman and it means sacrificer or master of the house for whom Brahmin performs 'sacrifice' (in Vedic times) or religious rite. Kamin is derived from the vernacular Kam or work and Kamin means a worker. At the present time, the term Kami describes not so much the artisans, who are known by their particular caste names, for example, Tarkhan (carpenter), Lohar (ironsmith), but the Kamins, that is, the workers - the low caste landless labourers. These labourers go under various names: Kamin (worker), Kameen (menial); hali (ploughman or one who used 'hal' or plough); pandy³ (the one who carries 'pands' or bundles of hay, fodder); chakar or naukhar (servant). These names indicate the very low status of landless labourers in the Jajmani system. The system with local minor variations and local names was prevalent in rural India, until about the last quarter of the 19th century. Thereafter the system started weakening.

Land in the village has been the principal means of production; everything else revolves around it. It is owned by the dominant upper castes, usually by the Kshatriya caste and to a much

less extent by the Vaishya caste. Here and there, Brahmins own agricultural land, bestowed as gift by a Jajman in the remote past. Brahmins have bought land with their own savings. However, Brahmins as the dominant landowning caste in a village are rare in North Western India⁴. The landowners as Jajmans have had groups of the landless - the Kamins - who provide services to the Jajmans. These services have been provided either in the capacity of farm labourers (mainly by chamar caste) or as artisans, carpenters, blacksmiths, (now as tractor and other farm implement mechanics) or as general scavenger/ farm-hand (sweeper or Bhangi caste).

In present day North Western India, particularly in Panjab and Haryana, the term Kamin is restricted to the landless labourers from the Chamar and the Bhangi castes who alone work for wages and a small amount of the produce. Artisans in general, work single contractual jobs for cash payment and are known by their functional caste names. The large scale use of farm machines in Panjab and Haryana has greatly reduced the need of old style ironsmiths (lohars). The machanics drawn mainly from the Tarkhan caste (carpenters) are not any Jajman's Kamins in the old sense. The Jajman - Kamin relationships are naturally permanent, personal or interfamily and hereditary. (Dumont 1970 S - 42.2) They are hereditary because of the caste ordained and birth determined place of individual in the agricultural setup of the village. They are personal in that the Jajman and his Kamins have inter-personal contacts. The relations are permanent because of virtual lack of mobility not only within the caste functions but also in the static village economy.

Progress in agricultural techniques e.g. use of tractors, chemical fertilisers, insecticides and irrigation leading to increased farm production has brought only marginal benefit to the Kamins. Hardwork and especially dirty and defiling work like disposal of cowdung, dead cattle⁵ etc., is ritually forbidden to the upper castes. Bhangis who do the work are indispensable to the continuance of orthodox Hindu community.

"Ritual purity for some can be maintained only at the expense of defilement for others." (Harold Gould 1958; Vol 14-489).

There are two power determinants in the Jajmani system, of which one is the apparent and the other the real power determinant. Superficially, it is the caste ranking that determines whether one is a Jajman or a Kamin. That is to say, the upper castes are Jajmans and lower castes are Kamins. On the basis of this caste ranking, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas among the upper castes should be subordinate to Brahmins but they are not. In actual fact, Brahmins (as Purohita) serve the relatively lower castes of Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the caste hierarchy, because, these two castes hold land. Where Brahmins are Jajmans that is landowners they tend not to perform their caste duties⁶ including the ritually exalted priestly functions. The real power determinant is possession of land. In rural India, land is important because despite industrialization and urbanisation, India is still predominantly agriculturist and agricultural land provides food and security. Further, this land is unequally divided and is held by one or two predominant upper castes. The result is that the Jajman castes are landlord and the Kamin castes are the tenants or farm labourers. Castes, though

separated are yet brought into relationship with one another due to economic necessity: the landlord Jajman wants cheap labour to work on his land, the landless Kamins need food. This feudal relationship is the core of Jajmani system and it in turn buttresses caste hegemony.

The ritualistic aspect of Jajmani system further strengthens the system: the Jajman holds the real power, the Kamins are befooled by the illusion of it. For example, at a marriage, the drummer's drum may be garlanded and worshipped. This gives the drummer - usually from a low caste (DOM) an illusion of importance on the occasion⁷. The lowlier Bhangi crossing one's path is considered very auspicious when one is going out on some important business. This is certainly true of Panjab. In South India, on the contrary, the very shadow of the Bhangi was considered polluting. These occasions excepted, the Kamins remain Kamins.

7.2. CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Nothing remains static in society and the Jajmani system is no exception. This system worked well as long as each village was practically insulated, there was a non-cash, local economy with few labour alternatives and the locus of power was with the Jajmans. These factors have changed, some more than the others and, additionally, external influences have further weakened the Jajmani system.

Relative numerical strength of the Jajman/Kamin castes has played its part in regulating the actual functioning of the

system. The conflicts and tensions that arose within the system were resolved by the Jajmani castes, which had preponderance not only of wealth but also of numbers. Jajmani castes usually outnumber individual Kamin castes, though Kamin castes together may sometimes equal or even outnumber the Jajmans. Increases in population leading to forced mobility (spatial and functional) is discussed later. At this point, the numbers while they may give a feeling of strength to a caste, be it the Kamins or the Jajmans, may weaken the bargaining power of the parties in the Jajmani system. A large number of Kamin ploughmen, for instance, may compete among themselves to secure the job opportunities available. On the contrary, a small number would be in the advantageous position to bargain for better working conditions and extra payment in cash and kind. The argument applies to the Jajmans, too, who if they are numerous, may compete among themselves to secure the services of the Kamins.

There is the factor of specialised service. Thus a single Bhangi family in a village has a monopoly⁰ of its Kamin services. (See also Beidelman Page 64; case No. 10, regarding the only washerman in the village who had moved away)

Introduction of modern technology in the village may weaken the Jajmani system. For example, the rich Jajmans have bought tractors and dispensed with the services of ploughmen (halis).

Population pressure and the law of supply and demand have inexorably affected the Jajmani system. In theory, each caste

is restricted to its caste duties and functions, but population increases have always caused surplus in all the castes with resultant shifting of the traditional caste functions. Each and every Brahmin has never taken up the priestly calling. Brahmins surplus to the sacerdotal needs of the community have gone in for related jobs, the white collar jobs, from the Patwari (village land revenue clerk) to the head of a government department. Brahmins have taken up functions which strictly belong to the other (high) castes, that of Kshatriya and of the Vaishya. Mangal Pandey of the Mutiny fame and his Jamedar officer both were Brahmins. So was Darunacharya the Art-of-war-and-weapons 'Guru' of the Pandavas and Kurus in the epic Mahabhart. The Kamin castes have not escaped the effect of increase in their population and the impact of machine-made articles on their traditional craft work. To quote Beidelman (P. 57), "In Senapur Chamars are no longer typified as leather-workers. None carry on this trade. Instead all are agricultural labourers. This may not be a new phenomenon since in 1828 the East India Gazetteer noted that many laborers did not follow caste occupation. Lewis found caste occupation diminished to a strong degree. Many artisans and all Brahmins had given up full-time work in their calling. Russel states that in his day less than half of the Chamars worked in their trade (That was about 75 years ago). Ibbetson and Grant report similar conditions. M. Singh finds that in the U.P. only 7.6% of the Chamars are tanners, 52.6% of the Bhangis sweepers. Shukla found that 58% of all those in the area he studied in Gujrat could not follow caste occupation, and that 82% of those have turned to agriculture." (Quoted by Beidelman 1959;57)

Within the geographical bounds of the village or group of villages, these surplus craft workers have inevitably joined the ranks of landless labourers. This is more in evidence among the Chamars (tanners) and the Weavers. Some among the Chamars also follow the caste occupation as a source of extra income in addition to farm work. Delhi Bhangis in corporation or other employment, also do their Jajmani private scavenging. Others have migrated to the towns and the cities to work in modern tanneries and in shoe factories. They have also formed co-operatives with the technical and financial assistance from Cottage Industries departments of various state Governments⁸. The Weavers are helped by the Cottage Industries departments and by the Handloom Board. I have mentioned this because leather and handloom exports earn foreign exchange. But the lowest of the Kamins, the Bhangis have not fared well. They serve in the strictest sense of the term; they do not produce exportable product. In British times, it was from among these ex-Kamins turned landless labourers, that the indentured labourers were recruited for South Africa, Guyana, Fiji, Mauritius.

The Kamins are paid in kind and cash and may also be given cast-off clothing, shoes etc, which the Kamins use as their work clothes. During sowing and the harvest, the Jajman landlord may provide him with meals in the fields. This ensures uninterrupted work at these crucial seasons. The Kamin's wife and children may work for a free meal and some payment. Even otherwise, a Kamin woman usually does chores in the Jajman's house e.g. fetching water and cleaning utensils (In

Panjab this is done by the Jheevan⁹ caste); grinding corn (seldom by the Chamar caste, as until recent times a Chamar though acceptable (because indispensable) upto the threshing and storing of grain, was not permitted to handle flour¹⁰.)

The break up of the Jajmani system as Jajmani system was hastened by the British rule in India, particularly from mid 19th century onwards. Paradoxically enough, it was at about this time that the British in India took steps not to intervene in Indian religious affairs, consequent to the Mutiny. Even otherwise, a caste-ridden divided India was a weak challenge to the continuation of the foreign rule.

"The British government did not discourage the malfunctioning of the (caste) system but rather encouraged its distorted continuity by according higher statuses to certain groups, granting titles and land etc." - (Murdock 1977; VI)

Nevertheless, Jajmani system started withering away under the challenge of the modern age which had dawned in India. The period was marked with centralised government, facilitated, as never before, by railways and telegraphs, the emergence of salaried¹¹ and wage earning groups that had reference to function as distinct from prescription, and the introduction of money economy on a large scale. The landowners were producing cash crops and selling the produce outside the village or far beyond the neighbourhood group of villages. India, as a colonial country was now a part of imperial Britain's world-wide economic interests. Indian cities and villages were

receiving a flood of machine made goods manufactured in Birmingham and Manchester. The village shopkeeper was selling everything from kerosene (paraffin) to kettles and imported cloth. The oil-presser, the potter and the weaver were slowly becoming redundant. The village crafts were almost destroyed as indeed they had been destroyed in Britain during the Industrial Revolution. Unlike Britain, there was no large scale industrialisation in India, which could have re-employed the redundant craft workers. These unemployed artisans fell back upon the land; the static Jajmani regulated labour market was swelled by the influx of the unemployed artisans who joined the ranks of the landless labourers and depressed their earnings. This further weakened the Kamins vis-a-vis the Jajmans.

I have discussed above the economic and the technological factors, the colonial experience and the demographic changes that have affected the Jajmani system. Political changes since 1947, and the social awakening, especially among the lower castes, the abolition of large land holdings and the redistribution¹² of some agricultural land to the landless labourers, have altered the character of the traditional Jajmani system. But these are changes on the fringes of a long entrenched system of exploitation of the lower castes by the higher castes. This is now getting overshadowed by the exploitation of the poorer sections of the Indian society (composed both of the high castes and the low castes) by the richer sections (composed almost entirely of the upper castes).

7.3. BHANGIS AS KAMINS

On the backdrop of this brief study of the Jajmani system in India, I now turn to the problem of Bhangis as Kamins not only of the high castes but also as Kamins of Kamins. The Bhangis as said above are the lowest among the Kamins. This is their position in the rural India and is no different in the urban situation. The urban Hindu may look westernised but his mental outlook vis-a-vis the Bhangi is still very much caste ordained.

The Bhangis of Old Delhi have no written history of migration to Delhi. According to their annals and antiquities - mostly verbal - they migrated to Delhi in the reign of the Great Moghul Emperor, Akbar, (1556-1605)¹³. Maybe, they were driven out by famine conditions, or by increase in population which made many of them surplus to the Jajmani needs of their villages. There was always the attraction of the city with its opportunity for scavenging work. Given the travel conditions in those times, the ancestors of these Bhangis could have emigrated from places within a radius of about 30 miles from Delhi. They may not have come in one big influx.

Whatever the name and organisation of the body for governing the civil affairs of Delhi over the centuries, Bhangis alone, as the lowest caste, have been responsible for the actual sanitation of the city, its roads, streets and narrow alleys and the cleaning of latrines and the removal of night soil to the dumping grounds.

At present, Delhi's civic affairs are under the administration of Delhi Municipal Corporation. The corporation, like other municipal bodies in India, performs the following main functions of local interest: supply of water and electricity, building of roads and, increasingly, town planning. Sanitation is one of the important functions of the municipalities and it includes the sweeping of roads and the cleaning of drains. In Delhi, as in the neighbouring states, scavenging from private dwellings is not the function of the corporation. It is done by Bhangis, not as employees of the corporation, but in their private capacity. I shall call it private scavenging¹⁴. From houses and flats, Bhangis collect garbage (and night soil from houses still without flush latrines) and pile it up in places allotted by the corporation. Bhangis in corporation employment or corporation Bhangis, as they are called, then remove these heaps to the garbage depots and finally to the dumping grounds. This private scavenging has the elements of Jajmani-Kamin relationships.

7.4. BHANGIS AND JAJMANI RIGHTS

This system is known by various names: Vrit (Wiser's "birt", It means earning from work); Dasturi (tradition or custom. The word is of Persian origin and no wonder because Persian was at one time the court language of the Moghuls); Grahki (clientele, in the sense that Wiser used..... 'each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes which is his "Jajmani" or "birt".'); Mohalla-Basti (small neighbourhood-habitation, which is the short descriptive code for the situation that latrines in a particular inhabited neighbourhood are

cleaned by a particular Bhangi family.); Jagirdari (ownership of estate: this refers to what a Bhangi may call his possession of rights of latrine cleaning in a particular area).

A Bhangi claims the exclusive right of cleaning a certain number of private latrines. This right is claimed against all other Bhangis and the latter recognise it. The right extends from generation to generation. The private latrines (Thikanas or places) may be situated in more than one Mohalla. This dispersal of Thikanas is due to the practice among Bhangis to acquire one or a few Thikanas when it is brought as part of dowry by a daughter-in-law. Only rarely is acquisition through purchase from another Bhangi. Altogether these latrines, which, on an average, are about 25 per Bhangi family are the exclusive domain (Ilaqua) of that Bhangi family.

Among his fellow Bhangis he is recognised as dominant (Ilaquadar) in his domain. No other Bhangi may encroach upon a particular Bhangi's domain. Encroachment is usually of two types: to solicit work and to dump rubbish. Any attempt at encroachment would cause friction and may lead to complaint in the caste council or Panchayat.

The high caste householder (including Muslims, Christians) is called a Jalman by the Bhangis. The Bhangi claims the right to serve the household from generation to generation and this is recognised by the other Bhangis. It is not obligatory for the householder to maintain these ties. But as he has little option in the matter, these ties continue in perpetuity, whether

or not the Bhangi is able to discharge his responsibilities to the satisfaction of the household. In practice, however, the Bhangi does his work satisfactorily. Exclusive rights of the Bhangis in his Ilaqua or domain are paternalistic. Within the Bhangi Community, the prestige of a Bhangi family in terms of economic status, is in direct proportion to the number of Thikanas (latrines) in that family's jurisdiction. There are other determinants of prestige, for example: whether or not a member of the family is in corporation or other outside scavenging employment or, better still, in non-scavenging employment. This latter will be discussed in a later section. During marriage negotiations, consideration is always given to the extent of the Ilaqua or domain of the Bhangi family, and the one with the above average domain is called a 'Khata peeta ghar' or well-off household.

Mostly Bhangi women (Bhangins) do private scavenging in Mohallas. Bhangis consider it as part-time work or an extension of domestic work. In other words, the ultimate goal of an average Bhangi women is to find scavenging employment with the Municipal Corporation, some realise this aim, others do not. Elderly, tradition bound Bhangi women grumble that young Bhangi women should not leave their home for full-time work with the Corporation. They consider it as improper that their young daughters/daughters-in-law should be sweeping the public roads. Scavenging in secluded Mohallas is another matter. In this, the old Bhangi women echo the value scale of the old upper caste men and women that a woman's place is in the home.

A Bhangi household's 'Ilaqua' or work area may be as few as ten households or any number upto about fifty households. A single upper caste household may pay the Bhangi from 2 rupees (12 pence) to 5 rupees (30 pence) per month, depending upon the economic position of the household and the size of the family. There is also payment in kind, which is one (or more) chappati from the household once a week. This collection of chappatis is usually left to the Bhangi children who also help their mother in garbage collection. The Bhangin staggers chappati collection over the week, that is, a few houses per day. Thus she can have something to eat at midday, before setting out for her home in the afternoon. The Bhangin has learnt through experience that if she needs to wash her hands before starting collection of chappatis, she should do that at a municipal water-tap; the high caste housewife will not let her wash "other people's filth" in her house.

Sometimes a generous¹⁵ upper caste housewife may give the Bhangi a cup of tea or food leftovers. In that case a chipped old cup is set apart for the Bhangin, in a nook of the house. The Bhangin picks up the empty cup, the high-caste housewife pours tea in it, the tired Bhangin eagerly looking at the tea, retires to a remote corner of the courtyard, away from the kitchen, muttering thanks. Because of the changed times, bowing and scraping is not noticeable now. Like the Kamin farm workers in the villages, the Bhangis receive old clothes and wornout shoes from the caste households.

In the upper caste household when it is festive occasion like marriage, birth of a son or a birthday, Bhangis receive extra cash, even new clothes. At religious festivals, the upper caste households give Bhangis 'Sucha',¹⁶ food (clean food, not leftovers) and even delicacies. To give clean food to a Bhangin on these occasions is considered meritorious to the giver. The motives of the high caste are plainly selfish.

Bhangi women often complained that it is usually the housewives who are hard-hearted. Male members of the household are generally sympathetic. Bhangin's request for old clothes and the increase in wages is often the source of tension between her and the housewife. These days housewives like to give old clothes to 'Bartanwalis' (women street hawkers who exchange new utensils for old clothes) Bhangin can only have worn out clothes rejected by Bartanwali. Whenever the Bhangin asks for increase in wages the upper caste housewife brushes it aside with remarks - "you Chuhras are becoming arrogant - are always after money but don't do much work. Have you ever cleaned the drain regularly?" and so on. If she complains of derogatory names like "Chuhri", "Bhangin", the housewife gets irritated and comments, "Do you want to be called a state Governor?" If the Bhangin misses scavenging due to illness or some other reason, the housewife threatens to make a deduction from the paltry wages. There is no paid maternity leave for sweeper women in private employment. She keeps working almost until childbirth. She has to provide a substitute to work in her place. The substitute is generally the kinswoman who keeps the money and other things given by the housewife. The

substitute works for atleast 40 days, the traditionally prescribed period of rest after childbirth. Quite often the housewife complains about the 'carelessness' of the substitute and wants the Bhangin to resume early. Babies in arms are often carried to work. The younger children are left by themselves in the home. The older children attend school rather irregularly. Particularly the girls of 10-11 years of age, start going with their mothers for private scavenging. Work for them is part of the early socialisation process. During the last ten years, the Bhangi Community has started realising that education is the key to their economic and social betterment and that education should be for all, both boys and girls. However, the education of the girls still gets neglected when the mother needs her help in private scavenging.

Private scavenging, as said above, is known by various names in Delhi and is also called Jajmani by the Bhangis. The system is said to have brought about various problems which are those relating to sanitation and the economic and social. N.R.Malkani as the Chairman of the committee on "Customary Rights on scavenging", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, in his book, "Clean people and an unclean country", 1965, has indicated some of these problems. His views on these problems will be described by an educated Bhangi, as those of a priest in the caste hierarchy, holding also a position in the government hierarchy. (Malkani's book is based on the report to the Government of India).

Malkani disputes the existence of any rights vesting in the Bhangis. According to him, the Bhangi's so-called right to scavenge certain households is as against his fellow Bhangis, agreed among themselves by mutual understanding, on the principle of live and let live. "The agreement is rarely a written one and has hardly any legal value enforceable in a court of law". Malkani asserts that he never came across any document being a deed of sale or mortgage or lease of a customary right. (Malkani 1965;143)

Bhangis of Old Delhi refute this assertion by Malkani. In a handbill issued by members of different caste associations of the Bhangis (of whom some are university graduates) the following statement is of interest - "We oppose the recommendation of the Malkani committee to abolish our hereditary" Vrit Khakrobi" (scavenging work). Malkani committee held private meetings with certain high ranking officials of Delhi Corporation who have no connection with us. We invite all Bhangis to assemble at Kutub Road platform¹⁷ on Sunday, the 3rd of July, 1966 at 4 p.m. Please bring your oldest documents relating to hereditary scavenging work and any copies of the court cases won regarding hereditary scavenging work."

"It is true", writes Malkani, "that a few private scavengers in dire need dispose off a few Thikanas by sale or mortgage by word, but this is uncommon. But if we assume that there was a semblance of a right of one scavenger against another which he could sell etc., there was no such right against the Jajman or householder. What the latter wanted was the cleaning

of his latrine by somebody somehow. He did not mind if a particular scavenger or any member of his family did it for him by hereditary custom but this did not create a right. Nor were you prepared to extinguish it by payment. Much less was the right created by any municipality, which in fact took no notice of primary scavenging or the government which was hardly concerned as a party." (ibid,143) Malkani also holds that the High Courts have decided that Jajmani system among Bhangis though it was recognised as between Bhangis could not be enforced as against a householder. Bhangis have never held that their Jajmani system was aimed against the Jajmans. The Bhangis have questioned the findings of the Malkani committee and even its integrity. In a wall poster, dated 15.9.1966, published by the Malkani protest committee of Bhangi caste council, the following lines appear in paragraph 3, of the poster - 'We believed that as Malkani committee had a Bhangi representative in the person of Mr. K.L. Balmiki¹⁸ the committee would certainly go to every state, district, town and village of India, look at the appalling conditions of us Bhangis and recommend to the government to take prompt and effective measures for ameliorating our misery. But we regret to say that Malkani committee did not see or interview even a single Bhangi in any of the Bhangi bustees (slums) in the capital itself..... how could they have taken the trouble to go to other states, towns, villages of India. It appears that the members have squandered public money on pleasure tours and sight-seeing and at the end produced a bogus report.'

Regarding the scavenging right of Bhangis, the poster makes this claim - 'Since the times of Muslim kings, the scavenging in the country (probably it is meant Delhi) has been the legal right of Bhangis and was recognised as such by the British in the Municipality Act..... Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur¹⁹ introduced a bill in Parliament in 1952, to levy sanitation tax and to abolish our customary legal rights (to scavenge in private houses), but withdrew the bill on our protest and opposition.'

7.5. MUNICIPALISATION OF PRIVATE SCAVENGING

Bhangis are very emphatic regarding their customary rights, even if the right extends to latrine cleanings in particular households. Bhangis would not like to forego these rights for the understandable reason that it gives them an assured source of livelihood, and extra income if some members of the family are in scavenging employment of the municipality.

There is the sanitation problem relating to Jajmani. Malkani describes it as "The practice of private scavenging.... leading to disposal of filth in a filthy way which almost results in making the scavenger a filthy person and treated as such. The disposal of night soil can be performed in a sanitary manner by the use of new tools and new methods in which the scavenger can be trained. At present the private scavenger is generally a woman or child who is an illiterate and unskilled person entrusted with the performance of an 'essential service'. Not being a municipal servant he cannot be trained or given new tools, like a wheel barrow, gloves, tools etc. All the money

so far spent on such tools by the central government is going (to) waste since the tools have been stacked by municipalities in the open spaces where they are rusting as the scavengers refuse to use them. It has been obvious that as long as private scavenging persists, any improvement in methods of work is almost impossible. Scavenging will thus remain a traditional and hereditary occupation performed in a primitive way - and that in this modern age of science and efficiency." (ibid, 140-141)

This rather long quotation exhibits the self-righteous mentality and woolly thinking of the high caste Hindu towards the Bhangis, and needs analysis. First, given the absence of flush latrines in most parts of India and in many areas of Old Delhi, it is assumed that disposal of night soil will be done manually. The Bhangi's contact with filth can be reduced if he uses "tools" like the wheel barrow and the gloves instead of the basket on his head. For the non-use of stocks of "new tools", Malkani blames the Bhangi who, in the opinion of Malkani, for his lack of skill and literacy cannot be trained in the use of these tools. Perhaps the assumption is that the literate among Bhangis should leave the non-scavenging jobs (office, teaching, technical), and come forward to be trained by the various municipalities in the use of these tools of the "age of science and efficiency."

These tools are simple to use; the local authorities should give these to private scavengers free of cost. According to Bhangis, the tools remain stacked because certain elements in Corporation office demand bribe before the tools can be issued.

Malkani's official finding is that private scavenging is the norm only in Panjab, Haryana, Hamachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kashmir, Marathwad in Maharashtra and Rayalsima in Andhra. In the rest of India, collection and disposal of night soil from houses is municipalised. There is no evidence in support of Malkani's opinion that municipalised scavenging in private dwellings has ushered "science and efficiency." Even in an advanced country like Britain, local (municipal) affairs need rate support grants from the central government. In India, where the general rates or municipal taxes are very nominal and the government grants are not much, it is difficult to see how "science and efficiency" can be introduced to municipalised scavenging. My own observations are that East and South India, where municipalised scavenging is prevalent, are the poor regions of India, and the regional poverty is reflected in the methods used for night soil disposal.

If the Bhangi earns more in municipal service, he has to work considerably more. Malkani himself has admitted that the Bhangin in private scavenging hardly serves 20 to 25 Thikanas or households per month, because these are dispersed in different places, "while in municipal service, the houses being situated one behind the other, a municipal scavenger cleanses 40 to 60 latrines and in Bihar²⁰ about 80 latrines per day.

Where there is Dasturi, (Jajmani), the service becomes extremely inefficient." Efficiency in terms of cost cutting when applied to latrine cleaning and thereby increasing the filthy work-load of the Bhangin is morally and socially reprehensible.

The sentence begs two questions: Has municipalisation of scavenging in certain parts of India led to any marked improvement in working conditions for Bhangis, given the non-flush latrines? (b) Will Improvements in methods of scavenging change the hereditary nature of this occupation, that is to say, will caste Hindus take up scavenging work?

My own assessment of the problem is that no real improvement in working conditions is possible in the cleaning of non-flush latrines, apart from palliatives like wheel barrow and gloves. As to scavenging as the hereditary occupation of Bhangis alone, no caste Hindu is likely to take it up whatever the economic hardship or inducements. In the 1950's, Rajasthan state government offered a salary of a University lecturer to any caste Hindu willing to take up scavenging. No one accepted the offer.

Private scavenging is said to have caused social problems among the Bhangis themselves. As it is generally the Bhangi women who are employed in this work, it adversely affects their family

and the interests of the children. The Bhangin feels tempted to take along her 8-12 year old children to help in her scavenging work. Or, the old daughter may be staying at home looking after her younger brothers and sisters. This deprives the Bhanqi children^{of} proper education and they grow up to accept scavenging as their proper station in life. This, however, is an oversimplistic explanation of a deeper social and economic problem. An English child who helps the milkman on his milk rounds or an English or American child who delivers newspapers to augment his pocket money does not suffer the fate of the Bhangi child in the matter of education. The Bhangis are caught in the trap of poverty, social deprivation and, above all, have the stigma of untouchability.

The economic aspects of Jajmani among Bhangis of Delhi are varied. These relate to (a) Bhangis who have a paid scavenging employment with the corporation, government offices, business or commercial house; Jajmani provides them with extra income; (b) those who rely exclusively on Jajmani for their livelihood and have no outside scavenging job; (c) the big Vritidar, that is a Bhangi who has a large Jajmani and cannot attend to it adequately either because of age or outside employment. He rents out part or most of his Jajmani to other Bhangis; (d) Those who take Thikanas on rent, either because their own Jajmani is not large enough or because they are without a Jajmani of their own. They are known as the Kamins of big Vritidar Bhangis; (e) Those Bhangis who are educated and have a non-scavenging job, white collar, technical or professional. Here it is usually the male Bhangi. The wife may be doing

private scavenging or she may have a non-scavenging job of her own. In the latter case, the inherited Jajmani may be rented out or even sold.

Lastly, is the problem of abolition of Jajmani and the municipalisation of the private scavenging. The Corporation and the government have no very clear-cut policy and whatever the policy may be it is at variance with the views of the Bhangis. Following the strong protest by the Bhangis in 1966, against Malkani Committee Report, it no longer appears to be official thinking to abolish Jajmani in the foreseeable future and to municipalise private scavenging. Any scheme to take over private scavenging by the Corporation will involve payment of compensation to the Bhangi Vritidars. Delhi Corporation has not got the financial resources to adequately look after the mere day to day affairs of the metropolis. Short of levying sanitation tax, the Corporation will hardly be able to pay compensation to the Vritidars. The central government can and should provide funds for compensation.

Municipalisation of scavenging will create administrative problems for the Corporation whose relation with Bhangis in its sanitation services is not satisfactory. Corporation has to deal with demands and strikes of Bhangis. It will avoid having to employ a large number of Bhangis, now in private scavenging.

Jajmani may have served the selfish interests of a very small section of Bhangis, namely, the Vritidars. But the system has been a low wagnetrap for private scavengers.

NOTES

1. Wiser was a missionary in a North Indian village. He had the time and the opportunity to closely observe the Jajmani system. Before him, the British district administrators in India, had mentioned this interdependence among village caste groups. Their observations were a by-product of their varied duties, concerning land revenue, famine relief, land tenure and so on. Notable of these administrators and some of their books (in parenthesis) were: Baden Powell, 1857-1941 was the founder of the Boy Scout Movement (The Indian Village Community 1896; Land systems of British India 1892); Crook (Natives of Northern India 1907); Darling (The Panjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt, 1925; Wisdom and Waste in Panjab Village, 1934); Russel (The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces, 1916); Slater (South India Villages, 1918) Mention needs to be made of Matthai (Village Government in British India, 1915) and Pandian (Indian Village Folk, 1898). Abbe Dubois, the French Missionary, lived in Madras Presidency for 31 years and retired to France in 1823. In his book Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, he described Jajmani-Kamin relationship in these words - "There are other classes too, though a trifle higher in the Hindu social scale, are for all that not treated with much more respect. Firstly, amongst the Sudras there are those who follow servile occupations, or at least occupations dependent on the public.....(The second category, according to Dubois is that of pariahs or Bhangis and the third of nomads) Amongst the first I place the barbers and the washer-men. There are men belonging to these two employments in every village, and no one exercising the same profession can come from another village to work in theirs without their express permission. Their employments are transmitted from father to son, and those who pursue them form two distinct castes" (Dubois, page 62.) That was written in about 1820. In 1958, Dube, in his "Indian Village", Pp 60-61, describes, Kamin trade unionism, thus -" It is not easy for an agriculturist to remove a family attached to his household and secure the services of another..... His difficulty will not be in dismissing him,

but in finding a substitute. Each of these castes has its own inter-village council (panchayat). Occupational castes have developed trade unionism, and their code of professional ethics and etiquette. No one else would be willing to act as a substitute for fear of being penalized by the caste panchayat. It may even be difficult for a number of families to join together and import a family belonging to that occupational caste from another village."

2. Employer - employee relationships are considered to be freely contracted relationships. On the free aspect of these contracts, D.N. Pritt Q.C. has this to say: "The substantial unreality of contract law is a product of the inequality of power and resources of the classes the inequalities are greater today in many fields than they ever were; their precise degrees and details often depend on the relative strength of the parties, and the urgent needs of the weaker....." Pritt refers to the varieties of contract, including the employment contract, which are made on printed forms "generally drawn up by the stronger side and containing stipulations in that side's favour." The weaker side urgently in need of what the contract gives it submits to the printed terms often without even reading the terms. (The substance of law. Book 4; by D.N. Pritt, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1972)

3. Not the Pandi or Pandy of the Mutiny, which name the British soldiers and officers gave to all rebel sepoys. Pandy was Mangal Pandey, the Maratha Brahmin of N.I. (Native Infantry) stationed at Barrackpore, Calcutta, who on March, 1857, revolted against his British Officers.

4. In the pre 1947 years, the Panjab Governor's Councillors were mainly drawn from the landlord/agriculturalists non-Brahmin castes - the Jats among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. A law was passed precluding 'non-agriculturalists' from owning agricultural land. Now anybody can own agricultural land.

5. Disposal and skinning of dead cattle is done by Bhangis. Tanning of leather is done by Chamars.

6. Among the less exalted caste functions of a Brahmin is the ritual eating at the annual Shradha ceremony in memory of the dead ancestors. Usually the run-of-the mill Brahmins go to the Shradha eating. The educated son who gets a secure job has invariably opted out of Shradha eating, as a demeaning function of the Brahmin caste. And not only the son but also, in most cases the father, too, on persuasion by his son.
7. The nai (barber) once used to act as go-between in marriage negotiations. But apart from that his status was low.
8. For mobility among chamars of Agra, see Owen. M. Lynch: "Politics of Untouchability" Columbia University Press 1969.
9. Jheever caste shows the world of difference between the Kamin's economic and caste status and the Kamin's occasional ritualistic function. I have already mentioned the ritualistic role of the drummer at marriages in Jajman households. Jheever men transported food ingredients like 'gur' (raw cane sugar) milk preparations, and, especially 'pacca' food in their 'vehngis' or twin wicker baskets suspended from the two ends of a pole carried on the shoulder. ('Pacca' or inclusive food is basically fried food and includes Indian sweets. 'Kacha' or exclusive food is the ordinarily cooked food which goes stale quickly in the hot Indian climate and is ritually liable to pollution. For further information on 'Kacha' and 'Pacca' food, see Khare: The Hindu Hearth and Home, especially chapter 3, Pp 61-65). The most colourful and auspicious ritualistic function of the Jheever men was to act as 'doli' bearers (Sedan Carriers) for the newly-wed bride. These days the bride leaves her parental home - depending on the geographical and economic situation of her in-laws - in car, bus or train. Nevertheless, the bride's first journey is still called doli ceremony even though the Doli (Sedan) is no longer in vogue.

Jheever woman, known as Jheevari, has 'bhatti' or oven for roasting grains, which the village folk enjoy eating in the afternoons. The aroma of the roasting grain, especially maize (corn) is fragrant. The fuel is heaps of autumn leaves and dry

twigs and bushes which the Jheevari and young children collect. These are stored in a nearby mud built cubicle. Jheevari's 'bhatti' has nearly disappeared from the village scene. Jheevars have moved away from the traditional work; even otherwise there are few leaves to gather together as the village common has contracted, the trees and the scattered hedges have given way to even more intensive crop cultivation.

The grain is roasted in a shallow steel pan or burnt clay pan, its bottom covered with sand taken from a monsoon nulla. The grain being roasted is sifted and stirred with a scythe. Payment for roasting is in kind or cash and is about 15% of the grain, or its cash value, brought for roasting. Payment is 'bhara' or fare or payment for service.

Jheevars did not work on the land as such. Technology adversely affected them as it did to the weavers. In the case of the weaver, it was the machine made Manchester cloth, until Indian cotton mills took over. For the decline in the Kamin functions of the Jheevar men, technology was responsible in a roundabout way. Railways linked the cities with the countryside. The upper castes travelled far beyond their villages for business and pleasure. Strict food codes could not be observed on the railway platforms and in city restaurants.

The Jajman, returning to the village, was a little less concerned in matters of handling and serving of food. Empty Kerosene tins - end product of technology - were used as food containers and could be carried by a caste lower than the Jheevar, without fear of direct contact with the food. Bicycles were replacing human load carriers even in the countryside. Social awakening against untouchability was always in the background, but technology in an indirect manner was making the Jheevar redundant.

If city culture, and technology originating in the cities, made the Jheevar unemployed, he migrated to the city, in search of work. Jheevars were pioneers in starting cheap eating places (Dhaba or Tandoor) in towns and cities. (In a Dhaba, cooking is

done under the sight of the customer). Jheevars were the fore-runners of Indian Tandoori cuisine. (From J. Sharma's MSS thesis on Modernisation in Panjab)

10. This may be compared with the attitude of some native Britons in Britain upto the end of the sixties, vis-a-vis the coloured immigrants. West Indians and 'Asians' were readily acceptable to work in bakeries and food factories, but they, and their children educated in Britain, were excluded from jobs that involved handling of ready-to-eat packaged food in shops and stores. A large number of Asian men and women were working as machinists or were sub-contracting in garment industry, but were not employed (nor were the West Indians) as sales girls as it would have involved handling the intimate items of women's clothing. The native British had no choice in hospitals where an increasing number of doctors, nurses and the auxiliary staff were from countries of Asia and the Caribbean.

11. These salaried and wage earning groups had caste colouring. As said above, chamars went to the cities to work in leather factories, or set up their co-operatives. In government employment, the upper castes held and continue to hold positions of responsibility, due ostensibly to their better education and social position. (This will be developed in a later chapter).

12. The upper caste land holding Jajmans, as caste group, have the majority block of legislators in all the states of India. These legislators, acting as land holding upper caste groups, have safeguarded their caste/class interests regarding abolition of Zamindari or large land holdings. These holdings which were held in the name of the old patriarch of the family, were nominally shared among individual members of the family, thus leaving very little surplus for re-distribution among the landless labourers.

13. The Biradari Panchayat (Caste Council) of the Bhangis of Old Delhi has always had nine 'Chaudharies' or headmen, modelled on Emperor Akbar's court of nine Councillors. This sort of imitation of the powers - that - be is a noticeable feature in India, even today.

14. Private scavenging is the norm in most parts of Northern India and in nearly all those areas that once constituted the native Indian states ruled by Maharajas.

15. Generous, because the majority of the upper castes are poor themselves; India though an exporter of tea and sugar, shows the third world phenomenon of selling her produce (and manufactures) to her own poor people at a much higher price, in order to subsidise the highly competitive exports to the rich, developed countries. This is Jajman-Kamin spectacle on the international scale; the Jajmans here being the participants from the developed rich North in what is known as the North-South dialogue.

16. 'Sucha' or 'Uchhista' food is that which is freshly cooked and applies to both 'Kacha' (exclusive) or 'Pacca' (inclusive) food. 'Basi' or stale food can be 'Sucha' in a limited sense, that is, according to one's orthodoxy, 'Jutha', on the contrary, applies to food that remains behind as scraps or left-over in the plate of some one who has finished eating. 'Jutha' quality is ranked according to whose left-over food it may be: the deity's left-over food or 'prasad' is considered highly beneficial. In descending ranking order the left-over food of one's guru or preceptor, husband, elder relative, etc. Left-over food, if not accepted by the Bhangin is thrown to animal scavengers. The Bhangins were (and in some quarters still are) considered as above only the animal scavengers of 'Juthan' food. (Khare: The Hindu Hearth and Home P 93). I have heard high caste middle aged and old women saying - 'That Tarbai food which I threw outside was not even sampled by the pariah dog..... I don't think Bhangin would have eaten it' (Tarbhai is stale for 36 hours).

17. This is an open space and was once a dumping ground for garbage etc. Now it is levelled off.

18. Mr. K.L. Balmiki was a Member of Parliament, elected on Congress ticket from scheduled caste reserve seat.

19. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was a princess from a small native Indian state - Kapurthala - in Panjab. She was the Health Minister in the Government of India, from 1947 onwards. She was a Christian but was truly high caste.

20. It was in the Jungles of Uruvela near Gaya in Bihar that Gautam became Buddha or the Enlightened in 588 B.C. Modern Bihar is among the poorest states of North India, according to some, because this region stayed longest under the East India Company rule.

CHAPTER 8

OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY - CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

8.1. OCCUPATIONAL SHIFTS

In the traditional Indian society the four-fold Varna system was based on a broad functional division of labour. When the non-hereditary Varna system deteriorated into hereditary caste system, each caste represented a specific occupation. Some of the caste names indicate the occupation they followed, e.g. Chamars, Lohars. The correlation between caste and occupation was not always rigid. Thus, agriculture was open to many castes. The caste system did not prevent occupational mobility; certainly not within the three upper castes. It was different for the untouchables who were forced to continue in their dirty and defiling occupations like washing clothes, working with leather, disposal of dead animals and the like. Migration to urban areas provided some opportunities to the untouchables to change their traditional occupation. The process has gathered momentum in recent years, because urbanisation, migration and industrialisation have provided opportunities for different occupations for all castes including untouchables. In fact, caste is no longer a recommendation or a barrier to any occupation.

After the abolition of untouchability in 1955, the higher castes cannot force the lower castes to perform any polluting occupation. According to the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1976 (formerly, Untouchability Offences Act, 1955), 'Whoever compels any person on the ground of "untouchability" to do any scavenging or sweeping or to remove any carcass or to flay any animal

or to remove the umbilical cord or to do any other job of a similar nature, shall be deemed to have enforced a disability arising out of untouchability'. (Section 1-A)

Legally there is no stigma attached to any occupation. In actual practice, all the polluting occupations like sweeping/scavenging, leatherwork, etc., are still considered polluting and thus continue to be taken up by specific scheduled castes. In the villages, stigmatisation of certain hereditary lower caste occupations, and the low income from these occupations has increased the migration to towns and cities. The anonymity of urban environment provides the social situation for occupational mobility. The urban situation by itself did not encourage abandoning of the hereditary caste occupation in the case of the Bhangi caste. Rather, the rural Bhangis have migrated to urban areas in search of employment as scavengers/sweepers—better paid employment in their hereditary occupation. As upper caste Hindus have consistently shunned polluting occupations, scavenging has remained the 'monopoly' of the Bhangi Community. This is true also of the post-Independence Bhangis who have not acquired educational/technical qualifications. While an upper caste educational failure, that is one who has not passed the Matriculation examination, will never 'stoop' to take up sweeping, a Bhangi youth in similar circumstances will perforce accept sweeping/scavenging as his unavoidable condition in life. There are certain factors working in this direction. The educational failure or school dropout Bhangi young man does not stoop to but only reverts to his parental occupation. He/she may have helped his parents

in private scavenging during his school days. A sweeper employed with the M.C.D. or a government department now receives better wages and the job is a secure one.

The flush system has largely replaced the dry latrines, but the work is unclean. Private scavenging remains the domain of Bhangi women who, unlike the Bhangi men have lagged in the matter of education. However, they want better situations in the scavenging/sweeping occupation, that is, in hospitals, schools and in the municipal corporation. Employment in these places means a permanent and better paid job, holiday pay and maternity leave.

Any occupational shift away from sweeping/scavenging is an upward mobility. Reservation policy of the government has brought about some changes. Quite a few Bhangi men now work as drivers of garbage lorries, as mechanics, peons and clerks. Some are self-employed as scooter-taxi drivers. However, the majority continue in the traditional occupation. At present, very few Bhangi women have moved out of the traditional work. I have come across only three Bhangi women who are working as school teachers. It is true that only one Bhangi man is a teacher and another a university lecturer, but many others have moved into other non-traditional occupations. The four teachers and one university lecturer from the Bhangi Community were not in my sample area. Their occupational mobility was well-known in their close-knit community. I met all five of them.

Urbanisation, migration to cities and industrialisation are both the cause and the effect of modernisation and they all help in the occupational mobility of lower castes. However, the state as the biggest employer, has played a considerable part in the progress of the scheduled castes. This is a requirement of the constitution. Vide Articles 335 and 16(4) of the constitution, it is obligatory on the part of the State to take into consideration the claims of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes while making appointments to their services and posts, and empowering the State to make reservations in the appointments for these communities. The Commissioner for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes is a constitutional body (Art. 338) and reports to the President of India, "into the service matter with suitable observations and recommendations appropriate for upholding the constitutional rights of the members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes." (Report 1978-79; 50)

A high powered committee was set up under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister to watch the working of various measures undertaken to achieve targets laid down by the government for the progress of the scheduled castes/tribes. The civil and ministerial services of the Indian government are of four categories or classes, as they are officially known. These are class I (senior administrators and secretaries); class II (positions of executive responsibility); class III (white collar office clerks); class IV (peons, manual workers). The sweepers, too, now come under class IV, but are listed separately outside the regular classification. Is it the socio-psychological continuation of the four Varnas and the outcastes?

There is now an element of reservation in posts filled by promotion. This was introduced when "the Commissioner's organisation continued to pursue the matter as a result of which the Government introduced reservation for Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes in all posts filled by promotion on the basis of seniority subject to fitness and in the case of promotion on the basis of selection, there is reservation upto the lowest rung of class I". (Report 1978-79; 51) In the same Report, the Commissioner recalled its observation made in the 1974-75 Report that the Safai workers were a special form of bonded labour in which only people of a particular caste were condemned to work in particular dirty professions..... the government should strive to abolish scavenging as a caste profession. (Page 123).

In addition to the central and state governments, local bodies also reserve posts for SC/ST. The Commissioner pointed out in his reports for the years 1971-73 and 1973-74, that the sweepers/scavengers were the most backward among the scheduled castes and therefore deserved special consideration for their all-round development and for their escape from their traditional occupation. The government decided in January 1976 that 25 percent of the vacancies occurring in the peon's cadre should be reserved for filling by transfer from sweepers 'farashes' (tea-'boys'), 'chowkidars' (watchman) who have put in a minimum of 5 year service and who may not have the qualification (Matriculation or under) for direct recruitment to the post of peon. However, they should have elementary literacy in Hindi or any regional language. (Report 1978-79; 62)

A similar scheme was started by Delhi Municipal Corporation in 1975. The scheme was formulated by the Municipal Commissioner. Under this scheme, 25% of the sanitary guides were to be promoted from sweepers (Bhangi caste) who had at least primary education. Qualified Assistant Sanitary Inspectors protested about this scheme. Bhangi sanitary guides formed their own union and asserted that sanitary guides should be promoted from sweepers as being in the profession they know the job better than anyone else. They have the experience and the practical knowledge and not mere bookish know-how. The scheme was dropped in 1977, when the political control of the corporation went to Janata party and the Municipal Commissioner was transferred to some other post.

The Commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes suggested to the government that as the posts of sweepers are filled by the Bhangi caste, these posts should not be grouped with other class IV posts as they give a false picture about the Bhangi representation in class IV posts (which posts traditionally cover peon, tea-'boys', watchmen). The government accepted this suggestion in November 1977. For the same reason, class IV category of sweepers/scavengers was dropped from inclusion in the statistics of scheduled caste/tribes representation in government jobs. (Report 1978-79; 65)

From time to time Delhi Bhangi organisations have demanded that a fixed proportion of reservation quota in government jobs should be given to the Bhangi caste. For the government to fix a quota in the reservation system would give rise to conflict

between various scheduled caste communities. There is already an anti-reservation feeling in the country which erupts in violence at odd times. In the Commissioner's report for 1971-73, it was noted that "the policy of reservation in posts filled by promotion was opposed by some of the labour/trade unions in the public sector undertakings. This anti-reservation lobby raised its head in some Government offices as well" (Report 1978-79; 87) The Commissioner cautioned the Central and State governments about these activities. The Ministry of Home Affairs informed the Commissioner that these activities did not warrant any action as the expression of opinion by anyone was not unconstitutional.

In December 1979, All-India Non-Scheduled Caste/Tribes Employees' confederation organised a rally in Delhi and protested against the caste-based reservation policy of the government and demanded a referendum on the question of caste-based reservation. (There is no provision of referendum in the constitution). The rally presented a memorandum to the President of India. These activities generated ill-feeling between the scheduled castes and the wider society.

8.2. OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY

We have examined in detail the occupation of sweepers/scavengers in Delhi city, the struggle of the Bhangi community to win better working conditions and remuneration for the caste work and the state help to the community to improve its place in society. A schedule of interviews was arranged and conducted in the community to find out the extent of occupational mobility.

300 families were interviewed to examine the shift away from the traditional occupation of sweeping and scavenging. Occupations are categorized according to their nature i.e., unskilled manual work, skilled manual work, small business, supervisory work and profession. Sweeping/scavenging has been placed in the category of unskilled manual work. The occupations of peons and 'bahishti' are also placed in the same category, even though for sweepers, the occupation of peon is also a shift away from their traditional work of sweeping and scavenging and carries more prestige.

Out of the 300 heads of families interviewed, 243 (81%) are working as unskilled manual labourers. In the unskilled manual category, 74.67% are working as sweepers and scavengers, 5.33% as peons in offices and 1% are employed as 'bahishtis' in the M.C.D.

In the skilled manual category of work, 17 Bhangis (5.66%) are employed. Out of these 17, 3(1%) are in the garden department of the corporation 1 (.33%) is working as 'Khalasi'. 4(1.33%) are employed in skilled work like furniture repairing etc. 6(2%) are working as fitters and 2(.67%) working as laboratory assistants. 1(0.33%) is working as painter in the corporation.

Out of 300 heads of households 3(1%) have adopted Shamanism as their full time occupation, while 1(.33%) is working as full time artist (Musician).

Out of the families interviewed 3(1%) are small businessmen. They are Kabarīs who deal in waste paper, old bottles, scrap tin and other waste. In fact, most of the sweepers pick tin, rubber, old bottles from the garbage and sell these to the Kabarīs. Kabarīs work across the caste frontier, most are from the trading caste (Vaishya). Some old established Kabarīs are prosperous and even rich.

In the category of highly skilled and supervisory work, 32 (10.66%) of the Bhangīs are employed. Out of these 32, 6(2%) are office clerks, 1(.33%) is telephone operator, 9(3%) are drivers, 15(5%) are working on supervisory posts and 1(.33%) is a policeman. Out of 300, only 1(.33%) is a Lawyer.

Since this study was concerned with change, sampling was stratified in terms of age categories to ensure adequate representation of all generations. The proportion of traditional to non-traditional occupation in each age category gives a picture of changing situation. Out of 300 heads of households interviewed, 125 are in the category A, which is old age i.e. 50 years and above. 100 of them belong to category B, which is middle age i.e. 35-49 years. The remaining 75 are in category C, which is young age i.e. 18-34 years.

Mobility in each category:-

In the category A, 113(90.4%) out of 125 are engaged in the unskilled manual labour. Out of this 113, 107(85.6%) are in the traditional occupation of sweeping/scavenging. Out of 107, 8(6.4%) are those whose full-time occupation is private

scavenging and 99(79.2%) are sweepers in the corporation and other organizations. 6(4.8%) out of 113 are employed as peons.

In the skilled manual work 2(1.6%) are employed as fitters. 3(2.4%) persons have full-time occupation of Shamans. In the skilled and supervisory work, 7(5.6%) are employed. Out of 7, 3(2.4%) are drivers and 4(3.2%) are supervisors.

In category B, the father's generation 122(97.6%) were in the unskilled manual labour. Out of this, 119(95.2%) were involved in sweeping and scavenging. In those times the majority of the people had private scavenging as their main occupation. Out of 119(95.2%) scavengers, 71(56.8%) were those who had private scavenging as their full-time occupation and 40(32%) were sweepers in the Municipal Committee and other institutions. 8(6.4%) were contractors for sweeping and scavenging. Only 1(.8%) person was employed as peon and 2(1.6%) were working as butlers with the British. 3 persons (2.4%) were Shamans. None of them was employed in the category of skilled and supervisory work, or the professions.

In category A's grandfather's generation, 121(96.8%) were in the category of unskilled manual work. Out of these 121, 118(94.4%) were sweepers and scavengers and 3(2.4%) were butlers with the British. Out of 118(94.4%) sweepers and scavengers, 105(84%) were private scavengers and 11(8.8%) were sweepers in public institutions. 2(1.6%) were contractors for sweeping and scavenging. 4(3.2%) were Shamans. None of them was in the category of skilled manual labour or supervisory work and any profession.

As we move down from category A to categories B and C, we see that the proportion of Bhangis in traditional occupation decreases and more and more people are employed as skilled manual labourers, and other supervisory work.

In the age-group B, (35-49 years) 78% of the Bhangis are unskilled manual labourers. Out of this 78%, 72% are sweepers and scavengers, 5% are peons and 1% 'bahishtis' in the corporation. Out of the 72% sweepers and scavengers, only 3% are those whose full-time occupation is private scavenging and 69% are sweepers in public institutions.

9% of the people do skilled manual work. Out of the 9% skilled workers 3% are gardeners, 1% 'Khalasi', 1% repairers and 4% fitters. In the small business category, 2% are working in the business of Kabarisi. None of them has Shamanism as full-time occupation. In the category of skilled and supervisory work, come 11% of the people. Out of 11%, 1% is employed as clerk, 1% as telephone operator, 4% as drivers and the rest of the 5% as supervisors. None of them is in any professional post.

The change is more obvious in the Age-group C, (18-34) where more and more people move to non-traditional occupations. Out of 75 people interviewed in the category C, 52 (69.33%) are unskilled manual labourers. Out of 52 (69.33%) are manual labourers, 45 (60%) are sweepers and scavengers in public institutions. None of them is depending upon private scavenging as full time occupation. 2 (2.67%) are 'bahishti' in corporation and 5 (6.67%) are peons.

In the skilled manual work category, 6 (8%) are employed. Out of 6 (8%) skilled manual workers, 3 (4%) are in the repair work, 2 (2.67%) are laboratory assistants 1 (1.33%) is a painter. 1 (1.33%) is a shopkeeper (Kabari) and 1 (1.33%) is a full-time musician.

In the category of skilled (non-manual) and supervisory work, come 14 (18.67%) of the people. Out of 14 (18.67%) skilled workers, 5 (6.67%) are clerks, 2 (2.67%) are drivers, 6 (8%) are supervisors and 1 (1.33%) is in police.

Out of 75, 1 (1.33%) is a Lawyer.

As is evident from the percentages given above, maximum change is discernible in the younger generation of age-group C. Here 60% of the people are employed in the traditional occupation of sweeping and scavenging as compared to age-group B, where 72% of the people are in the traditional occupation. The proportion of people pursuing traditional occupation is the highest in age-group A, where 85.6% of the people are in the traditional occupation.

In the skilled manual categories, more people are in the age-group C than in the previous generations. In the skilled and supervisory category, the largest number of people are in the age-group C, where 18.67% are working as clerks, drivers and supervisors.

From the above tables, it appears that a large majority of

Bhangis are still in the caste based occupation. In the younger generation, there is now a tendency towards more diverse occupations. Urbanisation does provide increased and varied opportunities for the Bhangi caste. But at the same time, urbanisation also means more scavenging and sweeping. If the city-born Bhangis are not available in sufficient numbers, then migrant Bhangis from villages take up the traditional work. Only the reservation policy of the government has brought about some changes.

Occupational Mobility of Bhangi Women:-

Information was gathered about employment of 300 women (wives of the heads of households). 175 out of 300 (58.33%) women are engaged in private scavenging. 104 out of 300 (34.67%) work in Corporation and other public institutions. Out of 104, 24 women (8%) have retained their mohallas for private scavenging along with their jobs. The remaining 21 (7%) women are not doing any work. The reasons were:-

7 out of 21 (2.33%) were not working due to old age. They had done private scavenging when they were young, but now their children (daughters/daughters-in-law) were doing private scavenging. 9 out of 21 (3%) were not working because their husbands had better jobs and the husbands did not want their wives to scavenge. 3 (1%) of the women had sub-let their mohallas to others for scavenging. Rest of the 2 (.67%) did not have any mohalla or any other job.

There is very little difference between the three generations of women as far as their employment is concerned. In generation

A, 60% of the women are private scavengers, 34.46% are Corporation scavengers and 5.6% are not working.

In generation B also, 60% of the women are private scavengers, 36% are sweepers in Corporation and other public institutions, 2.67% have sub-let their mohallas, 10.67% are not working. Maximum change is observable in the number of non-working women in category C. When men move out to better jobs, they prefer to take their wives out of the sweeping occupation. In these cases, the fact that the wife can sit at home is a sign of high status among the Bhangi Community, and a sign of relief for that particular Bhangi woman. There are very restricted chances of women's mobility from this occupation, the primary reason being that women are not trained for any other occupation. Until recent times, female education was negligible in Bhangi Community.

Bhangi woman's work provides income to the family. This is substantially more in the case of the Bhangin who is employed with the Municipal Corporation. Her employment does not increase her decision making role in the family. Major financial decisions are taken by the male members of the family, while minor decisions like what to cook and what to buy for the day to day material needs of the family are taken by the women.

The large majority of Bhangi men and women are still in the caste occupation. They were full of disgust for this dirty work, but had to do it out of economic necessity, as they lacked in education or training for any other work. Some people, particularly of the older generations, expressed their indifference towards the dirty nature of the occupation. They said

that they did not want to condemn the occupation which gave them livelihood. Some of them were fatalistic and accepted it all as God-ordained.

Bhangis of the younger generation are resentful of the association of their caste with the occupation of sweeping and scavenging. Those of this age-group who are still in this occupation are determined that their children will be educated and shall not be sweepers/scavengers. Those who have taken up other occupations have certainly paved the way for their childrens' occupation mobility. Some of them remarked sarcastically that their ancestors had cleaned enough rubbish of the other castes, now those other castes should do this work.

8.3. IDENTITY CONFLICT

The social distance between the occupationally mobile Bhangis and the rest of the society is not necessarily reduced. Their integration with the upper castes is not an easy thing. The occupational mobility does not guarantee their integration into the larger society. While their aspirations of economic betterment are fulfilled to some extent, the achieved status does not result in their acceptance as equals. They often find themselves isolated and alone. However, occupationally mobile Bhangis do have some social interaction with the upper castes, but it remains confined to a limited sphere. Their commensality, marriage and most other social relations remain with the members of their own caste. Job reservation policy of the government has brought some changes, but others do not accept the special treatment for the scheduled castes in the same spirit. Most of

the educated Bhangis nurture feelings of hurt and grievance. This in turn induces in them dissatisfaction towards the larger society. "Revolutionary potential exists only among those who are occupationally mobile yet restricted socially by their caste identity." (Chatterjee 1981; 98) The case histories illustrate these points. These case histories are special interviews conducted outside the sample of 300 mentioned above.

Case Histories:-

1. Jawahar Lal Sinandi (Age 32, B.A. (Hons))

Clerk in National Textile Corporation, a government of India undertaking.

"I completed my education the hard way. My father was a Corporation sweeper. He had nine children. We had private mohallas also. In the mornings, I did private scavenging and from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. attended school. Tired and often late for school I took half-hearted interest in studies. It was embarrassing for me to see my Jajmans' children as my class fellows. My teacher often said that Bhangis were incapable of mental work. His remarks gave me inverse inspiration.

After finishing school, I joined full-time B.A. (Hons) at an evening college. My elder brother's wife took over private scavenging from me. During the morning, I used to help my father in Corporation scavenging. I also worked as a casual helper in an engineering firm. My family objected to this as they believed that my labourer's job brought disgrace to the family. I ignored their foolish ideas in the matter. While

still studying for my degree, I got the job of salesman, (class III post equivalent to clerk) in the "National Textile Corporation", in the scheduled caste reserved quota. There is no untouchability as such in the work place, but snide remarks and discrimination are present. One frequently heard comment is that 'these are the days of the scheduled castes and that they have spoiled the atmosphere and working of National Textile Corporation (and of administration everywhere).' I am the longest serving salesman, but an upper caste Junior colleague was given promotion. (The informant did not approach the Commissioner for SC/ST regarding this discrimination) In the buses, people sometimes remark tauntingly about the ability of scheduled caste applicants - "Those who cannot even sign their name are given the reserved quota of jobs." The reservation policy is a blot on us.

I am living in the resettlement colony of Nand Nagri, where I bought a plot of land in 1976, on which I built my tenement. I do not have the money to buy or rent a house in any lower middle class area. In the resettlement colonies also we are living a socially segregated life. Among the other lower caste neighbours we are known as Chuharas. My work as a salesman makes no difference to my social status and we have no communal relationships with the other castes."

2. Ved Prakash Ridla - (29 years, HigherSecondary)

Clerk in National Book Trust, a government of India undertaking.

"My father is a driver in MCD and mother a sweeperess in the

Municipal Corporation. I did not have to work or assist my parents in scavenging. We were financially better-off. I joined graduation correspondence course but did not finish it. I got the job of lower division clerk in the National Book Trust in 1976. The Trust was formed by the late Prime Minister Jawaharlas Nehru in 1957. In 1974 or 1975, two scheduled caste persons got employment in the Trust. Now we have formed a scheduled caste organisation in the Trust to ensure that we get the full benefit of the reservation policy.

In our office, upper caste people have bad feelings towards the scheduled castes. For fear of the law they do not say anything to our face, but behind our back, make caustic remarks about our capability. These anti-scheduled caste feelings are more obvious at the time of our appointments and promotions. Generally our superiors put hurdles in our promotions."

3. Hari Pawar - (26 years, Higher Secondary)

Clerk in University Grants Commission.

"My father is an assistant sanitary inspector and mother a sweeperess in the Corporation. As a child I did not have to do scavenging, but used to sell eggs to meet part of the expenditure on my education. I was studying for my graduation in Commerce when I got the clerical job. I did not complete the graduation.

Upper caste feelings are strong in my office. When I joined the office it was already known that I had been selected in the

reserved quota. They asked me what my caste was. When I told them that I was a Balmiki they looked at me as if I were a strange creature. They spoke to me rather haughtily. My colleagues often taunt me that 'you will get promotion very easily and become our boss. We wish we could also become scheduled castes or, you scheduled castes are government Brahmins, because you get things too easily'.

I sometimes think that scheduled caste is another name for a criminal. A first class magistrate attests our application form for scheduled caste certificate. If I do not declare my caste, my application form will be considered incomplete.

In our office there is one more scheduled caste clerk. Upper caste colleagues used to treat him like a peon. I became friendly with him and gave him support and confidence to deal with these people.

During Janata government rule some anti-scheduled caste organisations sprang up. My upper caste colleagues said that they will become the members of these organisations and oppose scheduled caste reservations and promotions. Anti-scheduled caste feelings weakened after the end of Janata rule."

4. Het Ram Balmiki - (48 years, B.A., L.L.B.,

Editor in Indian Law Institute)

"Both my parents were sweepers employed by MCD. I did not have to do scavenging when I was a student. I attended DAV school. In this school run by Arya Samaj there was no casteism. After

matriculation, I became a clerk in Employment State Insurance Corporation. For B.A. degree I attended evening classes. After graduation I was promoted as upper division clerk. I obtained law degree from Delhi University where I attended evening classes. Thereafter, I became a translator in the Ministry of Law. After two years I got promoted as assistant editor, a class I post. Four years later I became editor, a post equivalent to the rank of deputy Secretary. All these promotions were in the reserved quota. Now I have a staff of class I and class II gazetted officers and stenographers.

I live in government provided flats for class I officers. I have told my neighbours that I am a Balmiki. They keep a certain distance between themselves and my family. In their eyes I am still a Bhangi, no matter what status I have achieved in life. They do not encourage any inter-commensal relations with me, though I read Ramayana every day and worship according to Arya Samaj principles. A Brahmin priest comes to perform family rites at my house. An ordinary Bhangi cannot expect to have this privilege.

In my office, members of my staff are from all the castes, including Brahmins. Apparently, my relations with them are cordial, but they keep on saying that I got my quick promotions because of the reserved quota system. There is widespread bad feeling towards scheduled castes, particularly in the matter of reservations and promotions.

I keep telling my caste people that education is the road to progress. But most of them are indifferent to my pleas. They remain indebted for various reasons and about three-quarters of their earnings go for repayment of debt. How can they be bothered about the education of their children?

I have not claimed any scheduled caste facilities for my children. My income is much above the prescribed limit. Secondly, scheduled caste status of children is unnecessarily underlined in schools. For instance, a teacher would say - scheduled caste children should raise their hands. This produces inferiority complex."

5. Tara Singh Bedi : (34 years; graduate)

Inspector of Schools for Physical Education - a class II post under MCD.

"My father was a 'khalasi' in the railways and mother a private scavenger. As a child I used to help my mother in private scavenging. I passed matriculation examination. Then there was a three year break in studies. Meanwhile I got the job of lower division clerk with MCD, in the reserved quota. I was a part-time student for graduation at Agra University. As I was in full-time employment I was not entitled to scheduled caste scholarship. After graduation, I did diploma course in physical education at Nagpur. I was on leave without pay for the duration of this course.

After I obtained the diploma, I was appointed as teacher for physical education. A few years later, I was promoted to the

post of Inspector of schools, but for three years the education department kept me on the pay scale of teacher. Only after I was selected as Zonal Inspector of schools in the reserved quota, was I able to draw the higher pay. An inter-school tournament was held in which some 172 schools participated. I was in charge of the tournament. A teacher who joined us there after four days did not know me by my face. He remarked to the other teachers - 'What's gone wrong with the Corporation (MCD) that it has foisted a Bhangi on us'.

One faces this sort of situation many times. My subordinate staff apparently behave well, but behind my back they will say all kinds of things. The upper caste colleagues are hostile to the job reservation for scheduled castes, but nobody would give us job in the absence of reservation policy.

The feelings of untouchability still prevail in varying degrees. When I was a lower division clerk in the corporation, there was a Brahmin colleague. For the first few months he did not know my caste. We used to sit together for lunch. This he stopped when he became aware of my caste origins. I asked him - 'Until yesterday you found no fault in me. Why has this discovery of my caste changed your attitude?' This prejudice about food was apparent also when I was a physical education teacher. My upper caste colleagues would share their food among themselves, but they never touched mine..... These prejudices are stronger when scheduled caste employees are given promotions on the basis of reservation quota."

6. Sant Lal - (37 years; graduate)

Clerk in the Government of India Office.

"My father is a sweeper in MCD and mother a private sweeperess (scavenger?). She also works as a midwife. She met the expenses of our education mainly with earnings from midwifery. In her midwifery work my mother used to pray that sons be born, so that she could earn extra cash and thus be able to pay for my education. Father had a low estimate of education for our caste. He was of the opinion that scavenging was to remain our lot and education was a waste of time and money. Mother, however, encouraged me in my school work. Our teacher of English language gave me physical punishment for any lapse in my work. He was of the opinion that Bhangi children were inherently unfit for education. This gave me additional impetus for study.

While at school, I used to go with my father to help him in scavenging. Before I went to school, I would have a quick wash under the municipal tap. Sometimes, this provoked abuse from others. I did not have the courage to answer back to people whom I was taught to consider as superior to me.

At school my classmates called me Chuhra. This annoyed me. Once a Bhangi friend and I beat up the pestering boys who then stopped calling us Chuhra. Our caste was known from the scheduled caste scholarships and could not be hidden.

After finishing school, when I was doing the commercial secretary course, we were passing through a phase of great poverty.

Our food used to be cooked in lard, the cheapest cooking medium. I was always afraid that my friends at the course will know my caste from the smell of lard in my food.

My first job was in the Sales Tax office, a temporary one. On the very first day, someone in the office asked my name and then the surname. (In India, surnames are caste/sub caste/gotra names.) As he was persistent I finally told him that I belonged to scheduled castes. He withdrew his proffered hand. He and a few others sat apart during the lunch break. (Indians overdo the handshake).

After working for a few months in the Sales Tax office, I started as a lower division clerk in the Provident Fund Commissioner's office. This was a permanent job for which a character certificate attested by a first class magistrate was required. I mentioned this problem to my office colleagues, when the person who had refused to shake hands with me, remarked - 'You should go to Jagjivan Ram (Harijan leader), he will do anything for you.' I said - 'Because of people like you thousands of our castemen became Christians and many more adopted Islam. When our religion is the same as yours why do you refuse to accept us as fellow human beings?'

My office colleagues know that I am from scheduled caste, but they do not know my actual caste. Once a colleague said to me 'I do not hate any scheduled caste except Chuhras because they are very dirty.' (A white Britisher loudly claiming to be without racial feelings will say the same about the British

'scheduled castes', the new commonwealth immigrants, the Chuhra here being any of the ethnic groups). I did not reveal my caste identity.

After I got this permanent job, I bought a DDA flat on hire purchase/mortgage, in the lower income group. In one block there are two other Bhangi households. We three have not mentioned to anyone our caste. I do not want people disliking me and my children for reason of our caste origin. I like the Panjabi people for their open and tidy life style.

My mother talks in the loud and abusive style of old Bhangis. When she visits us, I have a real fear that her mannerism will give us away. Once I had to ask her firmly not to talk in the abusive style typical of Bhangis.

I do not celebrate our caste festivals in my own house lest my caste origins be revealed to the neighbours. We go to our parents for this purpose. For instance, for the Mundan ceremony (ritual shaving of head) I went to Gurgaon and sacrificed a pig there. On my return, the neighbours asked me the reason for not inviting them for the ceremony (which they presumed took place in my house). I told them that according to our family custom, the ceremony takes place in the grandparents' house. Of course I did not say a word about pig sacrifice at Gurgaon. I have changed my life style a lot. I do not encourage my castemen and relations to visit me, though I visit them and keep in touch with my relations.

I have not declared my childrens' caste to their school. In the column "caste" I wrote Hindu Arya. Declaring the caste would subject my children to all sorts of humiliations. At the same time I urge upon my Community that as long as they are economically and socially backward they must declare their caste in order to make use of the educational and job opportunities.

When I was a student I urged my parents to give up pig rearing or eating of pork as it was symbolic of low caste status. Later on I realised that my ideas were erroneous. This came when a friend, who works in Ashoka Hotel (a five star hotel), took me there. A high caste friend accompanied us. I was surprised when he ordered pork chops for himself. I had always believed that pork eating was associated with Chuhras. But when I saw high caste persons there who were eating pork, I thought that these people just find excuses to label us as untouchables, but themselves indulge in everything."

7. Harikishan Santoshi - (M.A. and Law graduate)

Technical Assistant in the Ministry of Social Welfare.

"My father was a sweeper in a government school and mother was a private scavenger. During my school days I faced the financial difficulties common to the poor and the downtrodden. When I was in primary school I helped my mother in private scavenging. At that time I did not feel inferiority complex, carrying garbage and night soil. Perhaps I was very young and moreover, we inherit this role from our families. But as I grew up, I stopped this scavenging work, the school homework was also

increasing.

In the secondary school, I used to sit in the front row. One of our teachers, who was a Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh, used to send me to the corner shop for 'Paan' or betel leaf which some people chew. He was unaware of my caste. But one day another teacher who knew my caste came to see our teacher in the class. When our teacher asked me to get 'Paan' for both of them, the 'visiting' teacher told the Brahmin teacher who I was in the caste hierarchy. The Brahmin teacher never again asked me to buy his 'Paan'.

In school, we Harijan children were given woollen clothes for the winter season. I felt inferior and low when other children used to say that these clothes were only for the Harijans. These clothes are of a uniformly low and coarse quality.

After obtaining the B.A. degree, I secured a clerical position in the District Magistrate's office. The job was in the reserved quota. In our office, the widow of a former employee was working as peon. She refused to serve me water as I was a Bhangi, by caste. On a complaint from me, the District Magistrate, himself from scheduled castes, looked into the matter. The investigation revealed that some of the upper caste colleagues had instigated the female peon to refuse me water or tea. The District Magistrate wanted to take action, but before he could do so, he was transferred somewhere else and the case was hushed up.

After I became Technical Assistant, a scale III post, I moved to a rented government flat. I did not conceal my caste from the neighbours, who are government employees like me. They do not have social intercourse with us and do not allow their children to play with ours. We visit our caste people in other areas of Delhi and they, in turn, come to see us.

In our office there is an undercurrent of resentment among the upper caste employees regarding reservation of jobs and promotions."

8. Sham Lal - (30 years, Matriculation)

"I am a post-office clerk. My mother is a private scavenger. For five years I worked as a postman, passed a departmental examination and became a clerk, the vacancy was in the reserved quota. In offices, some people are very conscious about caste status. They often comment - 'The government is pampering Chuhras and Chamars'. Once, at lunch time, I put my tiffin on the heater alongside the tiffin-boxes of others. A colleague asked me what my caste was. When I told him that I was a Harijan, he hastily picked up his lunch-box and moved away. Since that day, he has not placed his lunch-box near mine.

Once I was transferred to Rajasthan. A Brahmin colleague and I rented a house owned by a Baniya (trading caste). Once the landlord inquired about my caste from my colleague. When he said that I was a Balmiki/scavenger caste, the landlord said - 'How can Sham Lal be a Balmiki? He goes to the temple, every day and is a teetotaler'. After this incident I had few

contacts with my colleague. The landlord was nice and friendly to me despite my caste. I am a vegetarian, do not smoke or drink, but the larger Hindu Community accords me a low status; I do not know who I am.

9. Hari Kishan - (41 years; Matriculation and Intermediate)
Teacher in a Harijan Sevak Sangh School.

"I have never done scavenging. After teacher training I started on this job in the reserved quota. In our school all the children are from the scheduled castes, mostly Bhangi and Chamar. Once the headmaster remarked that these Harijan children were unfit for education. I took strong exception to his remark, wanted to complain to higher authorities but did not as he apologised.

My daughter is in the 6th year class in a MCD school. Her teacher used to tell her to clean the school latrines whenever the sweeperess was absent. She told my daughter - 'Scavenging is always done by your caste. You will have to do this work after your marriage. You will learn the job if you clean school latrines.' I was furious when my daughter told me about the incident. I complained to the school head and also the local Councillor. Delhi Municipal Corporation gave a formal warning to the teacher."

The requirements of democratic politics compel the dominant groups to co-opt the educated Bhangis into the economic and political positions. However, this is not matched by social

acceptance. Inveterate social norms and traditions still condition the higher and middle caste people to maintain distance from the Bhangis. The educated Bhangis often find themselves in the unenviable position of moving away from their own Community but not accepted by the dominant Community.

It is not unusual in this situation to find these educated Bhangis championing the cause of their own Community because, frustrated in their individual salvation, they must seek the fulfilment of their destiny in collective advancement. Various tactics are applied for limiting and countering their deprivation.

TABLE I

PAGINATION ERROR

TABLE 2

Total families interviewed - 300

Type of work	Out of the total interviewed	Percentage
<u>(a) Unskilled Manual work</u>		
1. Sweepers/scavengers	224	74.67%
2. Peons	16	5.33%
3. Bahishtis (Water carrier)	3	1.00%
	<u>243</u>	<u>81.00%</u>
<u>(b) Skilled Manual work</u>		
1. Gardener	1	0.33%
2. Garden Supervisor	2	0.67%
3. Khalasi	1	0.33%
4. Skilled work like furniture repairing	4	1.33%
5. Fitter	6	2.00%
6. Laboratory Assistant	2	0.67%
7. Painter	1	0.33%
	<u>17</u>	<u>5.66%</u>
<u>(c) Shamans/Artists</u>		
1. Shamans	3	1.00%
2. Artists (Musician)	1	0.33%
	<u>4</u>	<u>1.33%</u>
<u>(d) Small Business</u>		
1. Kabari (Junk trading)	3	1.00%

Type of work	Out of the total interviewed	Percentage
<u>(e) Skilled and Supervisory work</u>		
1. Clerks	6	2.00%
2. Telephoen Operator	1	0.33%
3. Drivers	9	3.00%
4. Supervisors		
Asst. Sanitary Inspectors		
Sanitary Inspectors	15	5.00%
5. Police	1	0.33%
	<u>32</u>	<u>10.66%</u>
<u>(f) Profession</u>		
1. Teachers		
2. Lawyers	1	0.33%
3. Doctors		
		<u>99.98%</u>

TABLE 3
Total families - 300

Type of work	50 years and above category A 125	35-49 years of age category B 100	18-34 years of age category C 75	Total	% age of the total
a) Unskilled Manual work	113	78	52	243	81%
b) Skilled Manual work	2	9	6	17	5.66%
c) Shamans/ Artists	3	-	1	4	1.33%
d) Small Business	-	2	1	3	1.00%
e) Skilled and Supervisory work	7	11	14	32	10.66%
f) Profession	-	-	1	1	0.33%
				300	99.98%

TABLE 4
Total families interviewed - 300

Type of work	Category A	Category B	Category C	Total and percentage of the total	
	125	100	75	Total	%age of the total
a) <u>Unskilled</u>					
<u>Manual work</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>78</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>243</u>	<u>81%</u>
1. Sweepers/scavenger	107	72	45	224	74.67%
2. Peons	6	5	5	16	5.33%
2. Bahishties	-	1	2	3	1.00%
b) <u>Skilled</u>					
<u>Manual work</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>5.66%</u>
1. Gardener	-	1	-	1	0.33%
2. Garden Supervisor	-	2	-	2	0.67%
3. Khalasi	-	1	-	1	0.33%
4. Skilled work like furniture repairing	-	1	3	4	1.33%
5. Fitter	2	4	-	6	2.00%
6. Laboratory Assistant	-	-	2	2	0.67%
7. Painter	-	-	1	1	0.33%
c) <u>Shamans/Artists</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1.33%</u>
1. Shamans	3	-	-	3	1.00%
2. Artist (Musician)	-	-	1	1	0.33%

Type of work	Category A	Category B	Category C	Total and percentage of the total	
	125	100	75		
d) <u>Small Business</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1.00%</u>
1. Kabari	-	2	1	3	1.00%
e) <u>Skilled and Supervisory work</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>10.66%</u>
1. Clerks	-	1	5	6	2.00%
2. Telephone Operator	-	1	-	1	0.33%
3. Drivers	3	4	2	9	3.00%
4. Supervisors Asst. Sanitary Inspectors/ Sanitary Inspectors	4	5	6	15	5.00%
5. Police	-	-	1	1	0.33%
f) <u>Profession</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0.33%</u>
1. Teachers	-	-	-		
2. Lawyers	-	-	1	1	0.33%
3. Doctors	-	-	-		
				<u>300</u>	<u>99.98%</u>

TABLE 5

Category A - 125 Type of work	Ego's generation	Father's generation	Grand- father's generation	%age of the total
(a) <u>Unskilled</u>				
<u>Manual labour</u>	<u>113 90.4%</u>	<u>122 97.6%</u>	<u>121 96.8%</u>	
1. Sweepers/ scavengers	<u>107 (85.6%)</u>	<u>119 (95.2%)</u>	<u>118 (94.4%)</u>	
a) Private scavenging	8 (6.4%)	71 (56.8%)	105 (84.0%)	
b) Sweeping/ Scavenging in other Organisations	99 (79.2%)	40 (32.0%)	11 (8.8%)	
c) Contractors	-	8 (6.4%)	2 (1.6%)	
2. Peons	<u>6 (4.8%)</u>	1 (0.8%)	-	
3. Butlers	-	2 (1.6%)	3 (2.4%)	
(b) <u>Skilled</u>				
<u>Manual labour</u>	<u>2 1.6%</u>			
1. Fitter	2 (1.6%)			
(c) <u>Small Business</u>				
1. Kabari	=			
(d) <u>Shamans/ Artists</u>	<u>3 2.4%</u>	<u>3 2.4%</u>	<u>4 3.2%</u>	
1. Shamans	3 (2.4%)	3 (2.4%)	4 (3.2%)	
2. Artists				
3. Musicians				

Category A - 125	Ego's generation	Father's generation	Grand- father's generation	%age of the total
(e) <u>Skilled and Supervisory work</u>	<u>7</u> <u>5.6%</u>	-	-	
1. Drivers	3 (2.4%)			
2. Supervisors Asst. Sanitary Inspectors/ Sanitary Inspectors	4 (3.2%)			
3. Military				
(f) <u>Profession</u>	-	-	-	
1. Doctors				
2. Teachers				
3. Lawyers				

TABLE 6

Age group B - 100 Type of work	Ego's generation	Father's generation	Grandfather's generation
(a) <u>Unskilled</u>			
<u>Manual labour</u>	<u>78</u> <u>78%</u>	<u>94</u> <u>94%</u>	<u>97</u> <u>97%</u>
1. Sweepers/ scavengers	<u>72</u> <u>(72%)</u>	<u>92</u> <u>(92%)</u>	<u>95</u> <u>(95%)</u>
a) Private sweeping	3 (3%)	10 (10%)	58 (58%)
b) Sweeping in other Organisations	69 (69%)	73 (73%)	28 (28%)
c) Contractors	-	9 (9%)	9 (9%)
2. Peons	5 (5%)	2 (2%)	1 (1%)
3. Bahishties	1 (1%)		
4. Butlers			1 (1%)
(b) <u>Skilled</u>			
<u>Manual work</u>	<u>9</u> <u>9%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>1%</u>	=
1. Gardener	1 (1%)		
2. Garden Supervisors	2 (2%)		
3. Khalasi	1 (1%)		
4. Repair work	1 (1%)		
5. Laboratory Assistant	-		
6. Fitters	4 (4%)	1 (1%)	
(c) <u>Small Business</u>	<u>2</u> <u>2%</u>	=	=
1. Kabari	2 (2%)		
(d) <u>Shamans/Artists</u>	=	<u>2</u> <u>2%</u>	<u>3</u> <u>3%</u>
1. Shamans		2 2%	3 3%
2. Artist			

Age group B - 100 Type of work	Ego's generation		Father's generation		Grandfather's generation
(e) <u>Skilled and Supervisory work</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>11%</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3%</u>	=
1. Clerks	1	1%			
2. Telephone Operator	1	1%			
3. Drivers	4	4%			
4. Supervisors Asst. Sanitary Inspectors/ Sanitary Inspectors	5	5%	3	3%	
(f) <u>Profession</u>					
1. Teachers					
2. Doctors					
3. Lawyers					

TABLE 7

Category C - 75 Type of work	Ego's generation	Father's generation	Grandfather's generation
(a) <u>Unskilled Manual Work</u>	<u>52 69.34%</u>	<u>59 78.67%</u>	<u>69 92%</u>
1. Sweepers/ scavengers	<u>45 (60%)</u>	<u>56 (74.67%)</u>	<u>69 (92%)</u>
a. Private sweeping	-	3 (4%)	9 (12%)
b. Sweeping/ scavenging in other Organisations	45 (60%)	51 (68%)	53 (70.66%)
c. Contractors	-	2 (2.67%)	7 (9.33%)
2. Peons	5 (6.67%)	3 (4%)	
3. Bahishties	2 (2.67%)	-	
(b) <u>Skilled Manual Work</u>	<u>6 8%</u>	<u>10 (13.33%)</u>	<u>1 (1.33%)</u>
1. Gardener		3 (4%)	
2. Garden Supervisor		2 (2.67%)	
3. Repair work	3 (4%)	1 (1.33%)	1 (1.33%)
4. Khalasi		1 (1.33%)	
5. Laboratory Assistant	2 (2.67%)		
6. Fitter		3 (4%)	
7. Painter	1 (1.33%)		
(c) <u>Small Business</u>	<u>1 1.33%</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>=</u>
1. Kabari	1 (1.33%)	-	-

Category C - 75 Type of work	Ego's generation	Father's generation	Grandfather's generation
(d) <u>Shamans/ Artists</u>	<u>1 1.33%</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>3 4%</u>
1. Shamans	-	-	-
2. Artists	1 (1.33%)	-	3 (4%)
(e) <u>Skilled and Supervisory work</u>	<u>14 18.67%</u>	<u>6 8%</u>	<u>2 2.67%</u>
1. Clerks	5 (6.67%)		
2. Telephone Operator	-		
3. Drivers	2 (2.67%)	3 (4%)	
4. Supervisors Asst. Sanitary Inspectors/ Sanitary Inspectors	6 (8%)	3 (4%)	
5. Police	1 (1.33%)		
6. Military			2 (2.67%)
(f) <u>Profession</u>	<u>1 1.33%</u>		
1. Doctor			
2. Teacher			
3. Lawyer	1 (1.33%)	-	-

TABLE 8
Occupational Mobility of Bhangi Women
Total Interviewed - 300

	No.	Out of the total	Percentage
1. Private Scavenging	175	300	58.33%
2. Sweepers/Scavengers in Corporation and other Organisations	104	300	34.67%
3. No work <u>Reasons for not working</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>300</u>	<u>7%</u>
I. Old Age	7		2.33%
II. Husbands not willing to send their wives out to work	9		3%
III. Sub-letting of Mohallas	3		1%
IV. No work available	2		0.67%

TABLE 9
Women in Work

Age groups	Private Scavenging	Sweepers/Scavengers in Corporation and other Organisations	No work	Women in other professions
Category A 50 years and above	75	43	7	-
Occupation of their wives (125)	(60%)	(34.40%)	(5.60%)	
Category B 35-49 years	60	36	4	-
Occupation of their wives (100)	(60%)	(36%)	(4%)	
Category C 18-34 years	40	25	10	-
Occupation of their wives (75)	(53.33%)	(33.33%)	(13.33%)	